

# Whose Reality is it Anyway?

## Understanding the Impact of Deprivation on Perceptions of Place

a PERCEPTIONS OF PLACE research paper

THE COMPLETE EDITION



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## Foreword



Keep Britain Tidy is passionate about cleaner, greener places. Indeed, the desire to ensure *everyone* has access to clean and green places is at the heart of everything we do. I feel it is important to note that the research summarised within this publication is no exception.

After a substantial literature review and hours of fieldwork and analysis, this report aims simply to provide the reader with some distilled thoughts, a handful of very practical solutions and a couple of original, nuanced and functional tools. We hope all of this will be of interest to land managers, civil society organisations, communications specialists, community engagement practitioners and fellow researchers alike.

*Whose Reality is it Anyway?* was a unique exercise. 24 focus groups conducted with residents from four local authority areas, the research itself originates from a desire to explore the much talked about perception / reality gap. Basically, we wanted to identify what else is driving perceptions of place when we already know they don't always align with objective measures or actual standards. And it wasn't just about scratching an itch. No, at Keep Britain Tidy, we believe understanding what drives perceptions of place is an important step in improving people's satisfaction with the places they live, work and play in.

Why look at the impact of deprivation in particular? Well, from existing research we already know that deprivation is a key driver of perceptions of place. It comes as no surprise - those living in more deprived communities experience not only more local environmental quality issues but often we find that these issues tend to be more severe. With this in mind, it seemed vital to us that deprivation remain a key focus in our explorations of perceptions of place and it turns out this was a very important decision.

The consistent consideration of the impact of deprivation has enabled us to develop recommendations that cater for more and less deprived communities and, most importantly, has highlighted that one size most certainly does not fit all in the race to engage citizens in local action.

During these financially challenging times, when land managers are being asked to maximise efficiencies - in part by encouraging increased community engagement - *Whose Reality Is It Anyway?* is here to provide you with the knowledge and tools you need to improve perceptions of places (and of services) and to understand the triggers and barriers to engagement in *all* of the communities you work with.

Keep Britain Tidy remains committed to helping you deal with the challenges ahead and we hope you will find this publication a useful resource.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joanne Butcher'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Joanne Butcher, Head of Evidence and Research  
Keep Britain Tidy

## Independent Review

An independent review of this research was conducted on behalf of Keep Britain Tidy by Professor Gloria Laycock BSc, PhD, FRSA, OBE.

Gloria graduated in psychology from University College London in 1968 and completed her PhD at University College London (UCL) in 1975. She worked in the Home Office for over thirty years of which almost twenty years were spent on research and development in the policing and crime prevention fields. She has extensive research experience in the UK and has acted as a consultant on policing and crime prevention in North America, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, South Africa and Europe.

In 1999 Gloria was awarded an International Visiting Fellowship by the United States' Department of Justice based in Washington DC. She returned to the UK in April 2001 from a four-month consultancy at the Australian Institute of Criminology in Canberra to become Director of the UCL Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science. She was awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2008 for services to crime policy.



***“This is a really useful and exceptionally readable report for practitioners. I hope they enjoy reading it as much as I did.”***

Gloria Laycock BSc, PhD, FRSA, OBE

## Executive Summary

The result of 24 focus groups held over four local authority areas (Nottingham, South Tyneside, Hartlepool and Waltham Forest), this publication represents the findings of one element of a wider research project dedicated to exploring perceptions of place.

The two year **Perceptions of Place Project**, which commenced in 2009, aims to understand not only what *drives* perceptions of place but also how levels of deprivation impact on perception formation, if at all. This report is the culmination of Keep Britain Tidy's qualitative approach. In the near future, the work will be accompanied by a series of case studies describing work undertaken at neighbourhood level with nine partner authorities. It is here we hope to quantitatively measure the impact of six months of initiatives designed specifically to positively shift perceptions of place among local communities.

Keep Britain Tidy believes perception is an important area of study not least because of the all too common inconsistencies we observe between perceptions of place and actual standards – a phenomenon known to many as the 'perception / reality gap'. However, in exploring what drives perceptions we have been able to uncover so much more. Indeed, in a time when policymakers are increasingly looking for local solutions and for opportunities to engage citizens, we would now confidently suggest that understanding the mechanics and impact of perceptions at a local level is a very sensible place to start any activity.

By delving in to the impact of deprivation on perceptions of place in our literature review and primary research, our research team has been able to design the first of the two practical tools that make up the bulk of this publication, the **Keep Britain Tidy Scale of Deprivation**.

All things considered, the primary objective of the Scale of Deprivation is to encourage anyone working with local communities to enable communities to take more personal responsibility.

This tool is a very important contribution to our response to the Big Society agenda. The Scale of Deprivation enhances our understanding of how best to engage different communities, why these differences matter and what impact levels of

deprivation have on feelings of influence and people's likelihood to 'get involved'. To do this, the Scale of Deprivation details **three Perception Principles**. We like to think of these principles as the key 'tendencies' or 'rules of thumb' we observed at either end of the deprivation scale.

## Keep Britain Tidy Scale of Deprivation Perception Principles

### # 1

The first Perception Principle, *People & Places*, considers how levels of deprivation affect how people view their community, how they think about the role they play in their neighbourhood and the responsibility they feel towards the people who live there.

One of the key recommendations to come out of the Scale of Deprivation, Perception Principle #1 tells us that individuals from more deprived communities are much more likely to be motivated by localised, emotionalised and personalised calls to social action.

Meanwhile, it is more likely that individuals from less deprived communities will be motivated by economically and physically contextualised calls to community participation. As an example, we believe informing them about the impact of poor local environmental quality on property valuations would be a particularly potent message.

The developmental research that culminated in the Scale of Deprivation also explains why individuals from less deprived communities are also much more likely to get engaged in activities through a *community of interest* (including faith groups, 'Friends of...' societies and places of work) than they are through the geographically defined communities frequently favoured by service providers and civil society organisations.

Additional impact of Perception Principle #1 is observed when looking into preferred modes of community informing. Indeed, we now know that individuals from more deprived communities are much more likely to prioritise talking to one another than those from less deprived communities who are frequently more likely to report issues promptly through official channels.

## # 2

The second Perception Principle, *Speed & Spaces*, identifies how the levels of deprivation influence the makeup of social networks and therefore how perceptions travel through communities and how far they may reach.

Perception Principle #2 tells us a lot about the way in which perceptions can shape the culture of a community by enabling us to see how far and how fast perceptions – whether accurate or misinformed – can travel through it.

The implications for managing expectations for performance and service delivery seem obvious and at Keep Britain Tidy we have worked hard to explain why problems reported to service providers in more deprived communities are more likely to have been an issue for some time and will, as a result, require a quick response. Put simply, deprived communities talk more and as a result perceptions can saturate an area.

Through the Scale of Deprivation we also want to raise awareness of the likelihood that problems reported through official channels by individuals from more deprived communities are likely to be just the tip of the iceberg.

## # 3

The third and final Perception Principle, *Here, Now & in the Future*, looks at how levels of deprivation can have an impact on how empowered people feel to deal with issues, with people from more deprived communities less likely to consider feelings of influence an important part of community life.

We have been able to determine that people from more deprived communities are much more likely to have a *local* focus and are much more likely to feel happier when the ‘effect’ of an issue is dealt with quickly (a tendency to want to see dog fouling, for example, picked up immediately).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this tendency among residents from more deprived areas to focus on short-term, output focused solutions to place based issues can mean there is an inclination to only get involved in activities that make a difference at the micro-locality level – namely, their street or their immediate neighbourhood.

In contrast, Keep Britain Tidy has determined that individuals from less deprived communities were much more inclined to have a wider focus (borough or even nation wide) and were much more likely to be satisfied with more strategic solutions that deal with the 'cause' of an issue (a tendency to endorse long-term behaviour change campaigns, for example).

The second tool provided within this report is the **Keep Britain Tidy Perception Wheel**. The Perception Wheel identifies seven drivers of perception of place that operate in conjunction with personal experience. Each driver is discussed in some detail within the report and is accompanied by a series of recommended 'nudges' that aim to assist you, the reader, to improve the perceptions of the communities you work with and, by association, individuals' experience of the places you manage and work within.

We have summarised them and our recommended 'nudges' towards improved perceptions in Table 1.

## **Table 1: The Keep Britain Tidy Perception Wheel Summarised**



<b>1</b> <b>Antecedent Experience</b>	<b>What the Wheel says:</b> People draw on past neighbourhood experiences. These experiences tend to bring about nostalgia or are romanticised. Brings imbalance to their current location and experience.
	<b>Recommended nudge:</b> Dispel myths and, wherever you can, encourage people not to romanticise the past. Flip nostalgic messages – how is the present better than the past? Use feelings of nostalgia to encourage participation in social action.
<b>2</b> <b>No News Is Bad News</b>	<b>What the Wheel says:</b> Media has a powerful influence on people’s perceptions. Likely to feel they only hear bad news and good news is met with suspicion. If nothing heard will assume no action is being taken to address key issues.
	<b>Recommended nudge:</b> Respond specifically to residents concerns (We asked. You said. We did). For more credibility use message champions. Be transparent, admit to weaknesses and apologise when you are wrong. Be smart about how you schedule your press releases – sometimes less is more.
<b>3</b> <b>Seeing Is Believing</b>	<b>What the Wheel says:</b> Perception drawn from personal experiences and observations. Seeing or witnessing things happening impacts how people see the world.
	<b>Recommended nudge:</b> Remember our ‘momentum motivator’ rule – people are more likely to get involved if they see improvements are already starting to happen. <i>Seeing Is Believing</i> is sometimes less about cleanliness levels and more about knowing someone cares. So, wherever possible, consider the use of ‘smart’ schedules.
<b>4</b> <b>Experts At Hand</b>	<b>What the Wheel says:</b> People validate their perceptions by referencing ‘expert sources’ (e.g. people they know in the police or the council). Can give their perceptions greater credibility.
	<b>Recommended nudge:</b> Understand the value and importance of all internal communications and appreciate that the people who work with you can be both your strongest ambassadors and your toughest critics.
<b>5</b> <b>Story Telling</b>	<b>What the Wheel says:</b> Word of mouth is a strong source of information. News is spread in person and meaning can be lost in a ‘Chinese whispers’ effect. Particularly apparent in deprived communities.
	<b>Recommended nudge:</b> Become an active part of the social networks that have your services on their lips. Be part of the conversations and make sure you share stories with the ‘talkability’ factor.
<b>6</b> <b>Strength In Numbers</b>	<b>What the Wheel says:</b> People believe in the accuracy and authority of numbers. They cite statistics, ranking and similar data, often out of context, as the source of their perception.
	<b>Recommended nudge:</b> Debunk inaccurate statistics. Provide positive alternatives that have the ‘stickiness factor’.
<b>7</b> <b>Prevailing Wisdom</b>	<b>What the Wheel says:</b> Often people claim that they ‘just know’ things are the way they perceive them to be. Many assume everyone sees things as they do.
	<b>Recommended nudge:</b> Identify which factors are reinforcing the belief that a perception is common knowledge. Be aware of what the prevailing wisdom is.

At the very heart of our Perceptions of Place research is the belief that small actions undertaken at a local level can really make a big difference to our perceptions of

place and to our shared experiences of the places we are in touch with everyday. That said, the two very practical tools included within this publication should be of use to anyone and everyone trying to communicate with more and less deprived neighbourhoods and trying to engage local communities in social action to tackle place based issues.

The key message though is the one we will keep repeating – in all cases of communicating with and engaging communities, one size most certainly does not fit all!

## Introduction

Over the years Keep Britain Tidy has been fortunate enough to develop a number of significant relationships with local authorities across the country. In this time, we have been in an opportune position to observe countless trends and have been able to get involved in many meaningful conversations with practitioners. As a result of this, we believe our organisation understands the key challenges our partners and friends face and we work hard to assist them in dealing with the key issues.

The lagging gap between perceptions of place and the reality of local environmental quality<sup>1</sup> issues on the ground is a recurring theme in our conversations with local authorities and is something our researchers have been keen to explore for some time. Indeed, discussions with our local authority partners reveal that some are performing well in terms of service delivery (or street cleanliness measured through National Indicator 195<sup>2</sup>), but have consistently low satisfaction scores for land being clear of litter and refuse (as measured through Place Survey data<sup>3</sup>). Equally, the reverse can often be true for other partners we talk to.

To demonstrate the point, Keep Britain Tidy has mapped the Place Survey data available to us against National Indicator (NI) 195a<sup>4</sup> (to provide us with a rudimentary visual of perceptions versus the reality). The results are shown in Figure 1 and as you can see, we observed no correlation between *actual* standards of cleanliness and the *perception* of litter.

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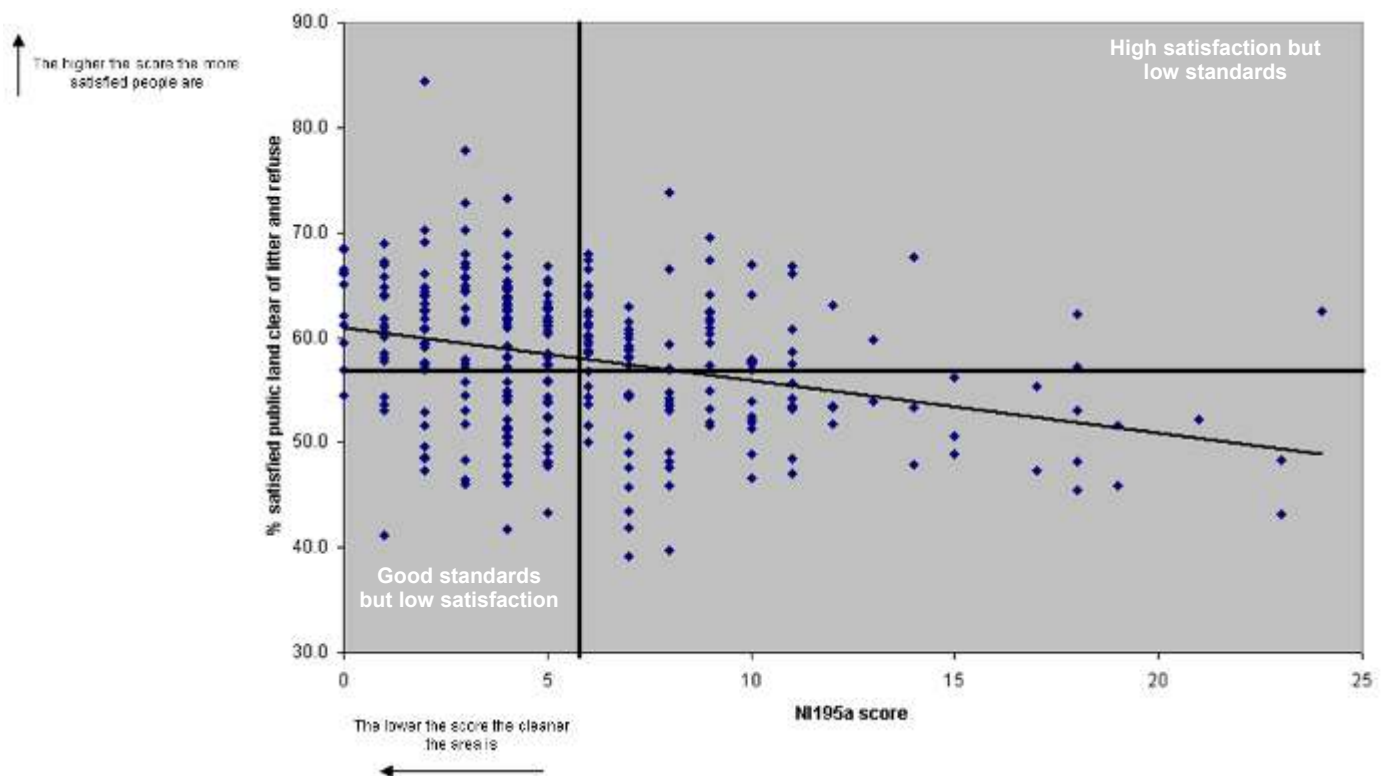
<sup>1</sup> We define local environmental quality as being the physical condition of the local environment to which the public has access or which they can see, whether publicly or privately owned – relating to the general appearance, as well as the management and maintenance standards that are evident.

<sup>2</sup> For more information see the National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Handbook of Definitions. This handbook states, 'The national indicators have been derived from Public Service Agreements (PSAs) and the Departments' Strategic Objectives (DSOs) and agreed across Government through the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review. The outcomes they measure and the indicators themselves provide a clear statement of Government's priorities for delivery by local government and its partners over the next three years. They will be the only indicators on which central Government will be able to set targets for local government.' The National Indicator Set was launched by Government in April 2008. National Indicator 195 looks at improved street and environmental cleanliness (levels of graffiti, litter, detritus and fly-posting).

<sup>3</sup> The National Indicator Set contains a number of indicators which draw on the citizen's perspective. These National Indicators and other statistics were collected in 2008 via the Place Survey. However, on 10 August 2010, the Minister for Housing and Local Government advised all local authorities that the Place Survey would be cancelled with effect from August 2010.

<sup>4</sup> The National Indicator Set 2008/09: National indicator 195a measures litter.

**Figure 1 Standards of litter vs. satisfaction with public land being clear of litter and refuse**



So, the data already in existence confirms that a perception / reality gap phenomenon does exist but, unfortunately, it does little to help us understand it. And, if good standards of cleanliness don't necessarily equate to high levels of satisfaction, we have to ask ourselves what else could be driving residents' perceptions of place?<sup>5</sup>

In order to explore the possibilities, Keep Britain Tidy designed a project that focused on public perception of local environmental quality (LEQ) to allow us to understand:

- How residents' perceptions of LEQ and their local area are formed, maintained and changed
- The relationship between perceptions and *actual* standards and why gaps between reality and perception exist
- How perception data can be used alongside *actual* standards to make improvements to local areas most effectively

<sup>5</sup> For more on the perception / reality gap you might like to have a look at Ipsos MORI, *Mind the Gap: Frontiers of Performance in Local Government V: Analyses based on the findings of the 2008/09 Place Surveys*, January 2010 and Ipsos MORI, *Understanding Society: The Perils of Perception*, Summer 2009. Both documents can be located in the publications segment of Ipsos MORI's main website: <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/publications.aspx>

The result is the Perceptions of Place Project (PoPP). PoPP is a two year project funded by grant provided to Keep Britain Tidy via the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

The project, which commenced in 2009, seeks to address the themes outlined above and build on our otherwise limited understanding of what drives perceptions in deprived areas.

To achieve this aim, two specific approaches were defined:

1. Work qualitatively with four local authorities at an *authority-wide* level, to understand what drives perceptions of place and how deprivation impacts on perception formation, if at all
2. Work qualitatively with nine local authorities (and their partners) at a *neighbourhood* level to identify, understand and improve perceptions of the residents living there and quantitatively measure the impact of interventions undertaken in the neighbourhood over a period of six months

This report consolidates our learning from the four local authority partners. Results from the second approach, covering the nine local authorities at neighbourhood level, are not covered in detail although passing reference is made on occasion.

Additionally, we would like to note that, although this piece of research focuses on the impact of deprivation on perceptions, readers can be confident that the research holds relevance for those wishing to learn more about how perceptions are formed and maintained in less deprived areas. Keep Britain Tidy would simply suggest that some of the recommendations on how to inform perceptions coming out of the research may need to be adjusted for maximum impact in less deprived communities.

In fact, Keep Britain Tidy sees this study as an important addition to a growing body of work broadly exploring the impact and effectiveness of local authority leadership, brand, communications and reputation.<sup>6</sup> Equally, and in line with Keep Britain Tidy's manifesto for a cleaner England, the project recognises that the delivery of cleaner, greener places calls for cross-sector working and community involvement.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see research conducted by Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute (2008) *The reputation of local government: Literature review to support the 'My Council' campaign*. For more details see <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=7816302>

<sup>7</sup> With this in mind, for example, the research team considered previous evidence provided by Keep Britain Tidy that there are strong links between the 'clean' and 'safe' agendas - see Keep Britain Tidy

## Methodology

In order to identify the local authorities that would most benefit from involvement in the Perceptions of Place project, Keep Britain Tidy sought partners from the 66 areas eligible for the Working Neighbourhoods Fund (2008). This list was deemed to be the most appropriate available and was certainly the most likely to detail authorities requiring support with issues relating to deprivation.

For each local authority on the list, data for each of the following factors was collated<sup>8</sup>:

- Performance for environment and street cleanliness – Litter
- Performance for environment and street cleanliness – Graffiti
- Performance for environment and street cleanliness – Fly-tipping
- % of residents who were satisfied that land was clear of litter and refuse
- % of residents who are satisfied with their local area overall
- % of residents who think that drunk or rowdy behaviour is a problem in their area
- % of residents who think that drug use or drug dealing is a problem in their area

Points were allocated for each of the above and, where appropriate, the points were weighted according to how problematic the issue was in the area (e.g. additional points for a subordinate score). Points were also allocated if the local authority was identified as being a priority area for the Home Office and / or the Department of Health.<sup>9</sup>

The total points attributed were then calculated and the results ranked by local authority. Based on the results, a total of 25 local authorities were identified. Of these, 22 of the authorities submitted an application to participate in the programme.

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(2009), *London; Its People and their Litter*. For copies of this report and the Keep Britain Tidy manifesto, *This is our Home: A manifesto for a cleaner England*, visit the Keep Britain Tidy website – [www.KeepBritainTidy.org](http://www.KeepBritainTidy.org)

<sup>8</sup> Data sources included the Place Survey, 2008, NI195 Surveys, 2008 and local authorities' own data.

<sup>9</sup> In particular, Keep Britain Tidy reviewed those local authorities allocated Spearhead Status. Areas with Spearhead Status have the worst health and deprivation nationally. They are the local authority areas that are in the bottom fifth nationally for three or more of the following five factors:

- Male life expectancy at birth
- Female life expectancy at birth
- Cancer mortality rate in under 75s
- Cardiovascular disease mortality rate in under 75s
- Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 (Local Authority Summary), average score

The Spearhead Group is made up of 70 Local Authority areas which map to 62 Primary Care Trusts. They are based in six Regions of England: North West, Yorkshire and Humber, North East, West Midlands, East Midlands and London.

Applications were initially considered for the local authority level project, to ensure that we selected four authorities where perceptions of the local environment are at a similar level to, or are considerably higher or lower than the actual (demonstrable delivered and recorded) local environmental quality. Clearly, this variation in the perception / reality gap would best allow us to explore and understand any and all differences between perception and reality.

The following authorities were selected for inclusion in the authority-wide research:

- Nottingham City Council
- Hartlepool Borough Council
- South Tyneside Council
- Waltham Forest Council

24 focus groups were conducted overall. In each borough, respondents were recruited from six pre-selected locations. These sites were chosen based on geographical and demographical variations in order to ensure the views obtained were representative of the borough and so that differences in experience and opinion could be determined from across the authority area. Residents were invited to participate via door to door canvassing and were offered a small cash incentive to participate. Each group was an hour and a half hour in length and was semi-structured by the use of a discussion guide. Respondents were recruited with consideration for gender, age, ethnicity, lifestage, housing and tenure, broader area demographics, social economic grading and length of time in the area. Respondents were asked to contribute to groups of a similar makeup in order to better facilitate comfortable discussions.

The focus groups were all conducted between December 2009 and March 2010.

Integral to our analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data derived from these groups was the wider reading undertaken to enhance our understanding of the impact of deprivation on perceptions of place, as summarised in the following sections.

## Current Understanding of the Impact of Deprivation on Perceptions of Place

The concept of society - and the ways in which people assemble to formulate the communities and neighbourhoods within them - has been of interest to philosophers, politicians, writers and researchers for thousands of years. Some of the world's greatest minds have devoted lifetimes to exploring social stratifications, class structures, familial tendencies and the social impact of power distribution. However, it is the belief that hierarchies, based primarily upon occupation and subsequent wealth, exist within society that has had the most salient influence on how societies are dissected and studied in the mainstream today. Indeed, the belief that hierarchies exist within society has led to the creation of various classification systems, officially adopted by governments all over the world.

Since 1913 the UK has used three different systems to 'segment' members of the public including, Social Class based on Occupations (SC), Socio-economic Groups (SEG) and more recently the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) which has now replaced both SC and SEG.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of these classifications has typically been to aid research and policy decisions, based on the specific knowledge held on individuals within each group, and they are widely used in most known sectors; private, academic, civil society and public - including central government.

Of course, research carried out to investigate environmental issues is no exception. Within the plentiful studies available today, there are many that address differences in experience between social groupings based upon differing levels of deprivation. Nevertheless, in reviewing these papers Keep Britain Tidy saw an opportunity to contribute to the field a research project that focused specifically on local environmental quality and the impact of deprivation on perceptions of the same.

### Why focus on areas of deprivation?

When we looked at existing research focusing on the intersection between environmental issues and deprivation we found that much of it was either too broad to be of practical use to people working with deprived communities on the ground or

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<sup>10</sup> For further information on socio-economic classification systems, please see the following:  
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/classifications/current/soc2010/soc2010-volume-3-ns-sec--rebased-on-soc2010--user-manual/index.html#1>



that it followed the somewhat understandable trend of focusing on wider environmental issues – predominately those relating to climate change. Reassuringly, there has been an emergence of research focused on identifying and segmenting the public in terms of their willingness and ability to act in more environmentally friendly ways. This body of work looks closely at how these behaviours relate to socio-economic groupings.<sup>11</sup> However, at Keep Britain Tidy we feel it is of vital importance to fill the gap and provide authorities with practical research that contributes to a much less populated intersection – the place where deprivation meets local environmental quality (LEQ).

Let us put this in to perspective for you.

Recent research conducted by Keep Britain Tidy found that members of the public were more concerned about the appearance of their local area than they were global warming.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore,

from previous research conducted in-house, Keep Britain Tidy is aware that deprived areas tend to suffer the most from poor LEQ and that those living in more deprived areas are much less likely to feel satisfied

**Recent research, conducted by Keep Britain Tidy, found that members of the public were more concerned about the appearance of their local area than they were global warming.**

with the appearance of their local area than those living in more affluent areas.<sup>13</sup> And we are not alone in highlighting the unique experiences of those from more deprived communities. Several government departments have targeted deprived areas to tackle the issues most intensified by deprivation itself - issues such as worklessness, education and those related to health.

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<sup>11</sup> For examples of this see Defra (2008) *A Framework for Pro-environmental Behaviours* which can be found at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/social/behaviour/documents/behaviours-jan08-report.pdf> Also of interest is Stern, C. (2005) 'Understanding Individuals' Environmentally Significant Behaviour' *Environmental Law Reporter News & Analysis* and Transport for London (2010) *Public attitudes towards climate change and the impact of transport; 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009* which can be found at <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/trsnstatsatt/climatechngeandtransport1>

<sup>12</sup> Keep Britain Tidy (2009) *The Word on Our Street*. Copies of this report are available via the Keep Britain Tidy website – [www.keepbritaintidy.org](http://www.keepbritaintidy.org)

<sup>13</sup> Keep Britain Tidy (2009) *London; Its People and their Litter*.

What we also know is that existing statistical evidence indicates that levels of deprivation are a key driver of resident perception.<sup>14</sup> This fact will come as no surprise when you consider the details that combine to form the bigger picture.

In 2009 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) conducted a piece of research revealing that residents in the most deprived neighbourhoods were twice as likely to perceive there to be LEQ issues (such as litter) in their neighbourhoods than those in the more affluent areas. Furthermore, from a sample of 40 local authorities, the JRF were able to confirm that the most deprived authorities did indeed suffer from poorer litter and street cleanliness scores.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, earlier analysis of the 2000 General Household survey, carried out by the Office of National Statistics, revealed that over half (51%) of people living in the most deprived wards reported higher levels of problems (including litter, dog mess, graffiti and vandalism) in their area compared with less than one in five people (19%) in the least deprived wards.<sup>16</sup>

The JRF have looked in-depth at this so-called 'environmental gap' between communities of varying deprivation and has found that not only do more deprived neighbourhoods suffer from more environmental problems than their more affluent counterparts, but that these problems also tend to be more severe.<sup>17</sup> Suggestions from the authors as to why this may be the case included higher rates of economic inactivity, higher population densities, higher proportions of vulnerable households less able to manage the neighbourhood environment and diminishing social responsibility - all of which were thought to make it harder for residents in more deprived areas to control their local environment.

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<sup>14</sup> Duffy, B. and Lee Chan, D. (2009) *People, Perceptions and Place*. London: Ipsos MORI. Ipsos MORI report that 82% of all variation in satisfaction with local areas can be explained by knowing only five characteristics of the local population:

- The proportion of the population with (university) degrees
- The proportion of people who are under-occupying their homes
- The deprivation level
- The proportion of the population aged under 21
- The region which the area is in

<sup>15</sup> Hastings, A., et al. (2009) *Street cleanliness in deprived and better-off neighbourhoods*. London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<sup>16</sup> Coulthard, M., et al. (2002) *People's perceptions of their neighbourhood and community involvement: Results from the social capital module of the General Household Survey 2000* London: The Stationary Office

<sup>17</sup> Hastings, A., et al. (2005) *Cleaning up neighbourhoods; Environmental problems and service provision in deprived areas*. London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. These findings were based on a combination of reports from residents, environmental operatives and service providers, as well as the observations of the research team during the study.

## Understanding the Limitations of Perception: Is the glass half empty or half full?

There are a multitude of psychological, philosophical and scientific theories out there that are designed to help us to understand perception. In fact, these theories focus not just on perception but go on to explore the relationship perception has to knowledge, as well as the contribution perception makes toward human action, at both the individual and the social level. For the purposes of this report though, Keep Britain Tidy will aim to keep it simple!

Perception, as we understand it, is the act of perceiving – the process by which we come to understand the things that are presented to us. As researchers we spend a great deal of time collecting people's perceptions. The trouble is that people tend to assume that their perceptions are an accurate reflection of what is out there in their neighbourhoods, communities and the world at large. However, as psychologists have frequently pointed out, the reality is that as human beings our perception processes suffer limitations.<sup>18</sup>

Firstly, perception is selective.

Consider for a moment one particularly famous experiment conducted in 1999. Psychologists Daniel Simons and Christopher Chabris directed students to watch a videotape depicting two teams of people passing basketballs to one another. The students were asked to count how many times one particular team passed their ball. Lost in their dedication to the counting task, 40% of the student observers failed to see someone dressed up in a gorilla suit walk through the teams, stare directly at the camera and beat their chest.<sup>19</sup>

Simons went one step further in a subsequent experiment that determined people were no more likely to detect unexpected events even when they already knew to expect something out of the ordinary. Indeed, despite being given forewarning about unexpected events (e.g. the gorilla) people's ability to detect a curtain changing

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<sup>18</sup> See Balcetis, E. and Dunning D. (2010) 'Wishful Seeing: More Desired Objects Are Seen as Closer.' *Psychological Science* 21, 147-152

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Balcetis and Dunning (2010) - Simons, D. J., and Chabris, C. F. (1999) 'Gorillas in our midst: Sustained inattention blindness for dynamic events.' *Perception*, 28, 1059–1074. To watch this video, you can visit Simons' YouTube page at <http://www.youtube.com/user/profsimons>

colour or someone leaving the video altogether was not enhanced.<sup>20</sup> It seems our brains can only perceive so much at any one time, irrespective of what we know might be happening around us.

How does all this relate to perceptions of local environmental quality (LEQ)? Well, one anecdotal by-product of a research project, funded by Keep Britain Tidy in 2009, was discovered when setting up a related experiment reviewing the impact of littering on brand. Researchers from Manchester Business School were able to observe how much litter needed to appear on an apparently unrelated newsreel before participants in the study even registered the litter was there.<sup>21</sup> Obviously, our thresholds for what is acceptable and what is noticeably degenerative LEQ varies too. This is because our perceptions suffer *selectivity* - encouraged to focus our attention on a number of things at any one time, we sometimes overlook the obvious.

The second limitation observed is that perception is often biased (or relativistic).

Again, countless experiments have demonstrated how perception can be influenced by things like desire, effort and fear.<sup>22</sup> And, in turn it would appear perception can influence performance. Anyone who plays golf should take note - golfers who perform well are more likely to perceive the hole to be bigger than golfers who consistently under perform.<sup>23</sup>

Authors in the field of behavioural economics have become increasingly interested in this second limitation, particularly in relation to human decision-making processes and behavioural change. Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, who recently penned the influential text, *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth and Happiness*, started their thesis by talking the reader through the influential insights of

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<sup>20</sup> Simons, D. J. (2010) 'Monkeying around with the gorillas in our midst: Familiarity with an inattentional-blindness task does not improve the detection of unexpected events.' *i-Perception* 1 (1), 3-6. Video available at <http://www.youtube.com/user/profsimons>

<sup>21</sup> This discovery was an entirely informal, trial and error realisation and was by no means scientific. For more on the effect of litter on brand see Roper, S. and Parker, C. (2008) 'The Rubbish of Marketing.' *Journal of Marketing Management* 24, 9-10. Roper and Parker hope to investigate litter thresholds in much more detail some time soon, so watch this space.

<sup>22</sup> For more on desire see Balci, E. and Dunning D. (2010) 'Wishful Seeing: More Desired Objects Are Seen as Closer.' *Psychological Science* 21, 147-152. For more on effort see Proffitt, D. R., et al. (2003) 'The Role of Effort in Perceiving Distance.' *Psychological Science* 14 (2), 106-112. For more on fear see Stefanucci, J. K., et al. (2008) 'Skating down a steeper slope: Fear influences the perception of geographical slant.' *Perception* 37 (2), 321-323

<sup>23</sup> Witt, J. K. (2008) 'Putting to a bigger hole: Golf performance relates to perceived size.' *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* 15, 581-585

psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman.<sup>24</sup> In the 1970s Tversky and Kahneman came up with what is now known as the heuristics and biases approach (or what Thaler and Sunstein affectionately refer to as ‘rules of thumb’) that reveal key biases in human perceptions.

The first, **anchoring**, considers why humans like to start with something they know in the decision-making process. For instance, Thaler and Sunstein note that when we are asked to guess the population of a city we do not live in, we are likely to start by comparing it to our own and adjusting according to any other facts we have available to us – whether it is smaller, a similar size or larger, for example. Behavioural economist Dan Ariely explores this concept further and argues that because of our predictable likelihood to anchor, first impressions count. He says,

*We might see a 57-inch LCD high definition television on sale for \$3000, for instance. The price tag is not the anchor. But if we decide to buy it (or seriously contemplate buying it) at that price, then the decision becomes our anchor henceforth in terms of LCD television sets. That’s our peg in the ground and from then on – whether we shop for another set or merely have a conversation in a backyard cookout – all other high definition televisions are judged relative to that price.<sup>25</sup>*

***“If you walk by somebody’s house and they’ve got candles burning, what do you think? You think, ‘Oh, a nice romantic night in.’ You do exactly the same thing walking down the street. You see five ‘hoodies’ at the end of the road and you think, ‘They’re going to get me,’ and you cross over.***

*Resident, Partner Local Authority*

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<sup>24</sup> Cited in Thaler, R. and Sunstein, C. (2008) London: Penguin, pp 25-34. Nudge is a book that explores the concept of choice and considers how we can better influence people’s decision making processes. For anyone with a keen interest in behaviour change this is a truly fascinating read.

<sup>25</sup> Ariely, D. (2008) *Predictable Irrationality: The Hidden Forces that Shape our Decisions*. London: Harper, p 30

The second heuristic or 'rule of thumb', **availability**, happens when humans assess the likelihood of risks according to how quickly recent examples come to mind. So, we might be more likely to fear crime for example, if we have recently witnessed an attack or arrest. Although, we must consider the role the media will play in perpetuating (and making readily available for recall) certain perceptions around local environmental quality and related antisocial behaviour. For example, a learning programme currently distributed online by Channel 4, *Teen Trouble* captures the current zeitgeist wonderfully. At the start of the documentary, journalist Sam Delaney asked members of the public how much crime teenagers commit. On average, the older respondents blamed teenagers for 80% of total crimes, but teens themselves tended to respond much more accurately. In fact, the programme reports, just 12% of known offenders are under 18.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, the **representativeness** heuristic is best witnessed when people use so-called 'mental shortcuts' to judge the likelihood of something belonging to a certain group based on their similarities. So, for instance, Thaler and Sunstein note we are more likely to assume a particularly tall African-American man is a basketball player than a relatively short Jewish man. Needless to say, biases under the representativeness heuristic can be problematic to say the least. This heuristic might just help us understand why young people are the focus of so much negative attention in the current socio-political climate. Is it possible that current preoccupations, particularly in the mass media, with youths hanging around on the street, so-called 'hoodies', gang-related violence and happy slapping among youth sub-cultures are working to encourage potentially counterproductive 'shortcuts' in all of us?

So what does all this mean? The well known idiom about the glass being half empty or half full is a particularly useful point of reference here. Used most prominently to determine whether an individual is an optimistic or pessimistic character, the question also serves to highlight that, although the reality of any given situation is frequently considered universal, how we process it – that is the way

***“Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.”***

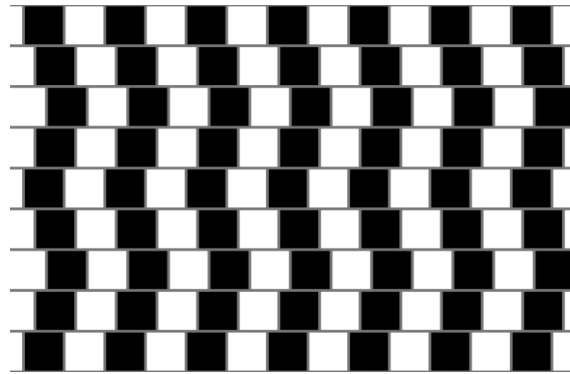
*Albert Einstein*

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<sup>26</sup> *Teen Trouble*, Produced by Tiger Aspect Productions for Channel 4  
<http://www.channel4learning.com/support/programmenotes/micro/teentrouble/index.html>

we *perceive* these things – can vary considerably. In short, reality and perception do not always correlate and reality itself can be pretty subjective.

Confused? Take a look at the Café Wall Illusion<sup>27</sup> below.



The Café Wall Illusion (Gregory & Heard, 1979)

You'll notice once first glance that the strips do not appear to be parallel to one another.

In fact it is the luminance of the borderlines that creates this illusion, but it takes us mere mortals some time to accept that the lines are indeed parallel and that the tiles themselves are consistently straight. However, as Thaler and Sunstein would say, our judgement (or perception) in this task was 'predictably biased'.<sup>28</sup>

There is one important final note to make here. Much like the lines in the Café Wall Illusion, researchers have been able to demonstrate that the way situations are framed - that is to say, the manner in which they are presented to us - impacts significantly on how we perceive them. So, in the instance of the half full or half empty glass, it has been determined that people are more likely to label it as half full if, prior to the question, it was seen to be empty and vice versa.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gregory, R. L. and Heard, P. (1979) Border locking and the Café Wall illusion. *Perception* 8, 365-380

<sup>28</sup> Thaler, R. and Sunstein, C. (2008), p 20

<sup>29</sup> In 2003, psychologists Craig McKenzie and Jonathan Nelson determined that we are far more likely to describe a 4-ounce cup filled to the 2-ounce line as half full if it was previously empty but that we are more likely to describe it as half empty if it was previously full. 'What a speaker's choice of frame reveals: Reference points, frame selection, and framing effects.' *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* 10 (3), 596-602

Would it be a huge leap then to hypothesise that people from more deprived communities might frame their perceptions of local environmental quality differently to those from less deprived communities?

Think about it this way - if you had to guess, would you say you and your neighbour have the same or differing views on how clean your street is? Why? Maybe you already know the answer to that question, but if you don't you would be forgiven for assuming their perceptions on street cleanliness are the same as, if not strikingly similar to your own. It seems obvious; you are both looking out of your windows at the same street. However, let's say we pay your neighbour a visit and ask them directly what their perceptions are. Do you think it's wise for us to assume the reality of the situation (as you perceive it) will be the only driver of perception at play when they provide us with their answer? Given what we have already learnt, probably not.

Of course, we are not suggesting it is useful or productive to turn away from perceptions because of this inconsistency. On the contrary, we would like to highlight this inconsistency precisely because it enables us to point out the usefulness of acknowledging the powerful and illusive nature of perceptions, whilst working to avoid the explicit or implicit tendency to assume these (subjective) perceptions always align with actual (objective) conditions. Instead, we propose that understanding what drives perceptions is an important step towards closing the perception / reality gap.



## People & Places: Using community as a framework

For Keep Britain Tidy the context to this research is very much 'community'. But in an age where digital communication is the norm, where people from across the globe are becoming increasingly 'connected' in one sense and isolated in another, and when even the remotest places on earth are accessible (to those who can afford it), we have to ask, what does the concept of 'community' really mean?

Needless to say the term 'community' is loaded with meaning. Indeed, we could explore the origin of community as a concept for some pages. However, for our purposes, let us review the two base ingredients to any given community (though it should be said; only one is necessary at any one time).

Geographical or **spatial communities** are traditionally the most commonly referenced but they can also be the least uniform and even the least cohesive. Spatial communities are communities defined by the space that they share (e.g. a neighbourhood) so they require that their members reside in proximity to one another. However, it is worth remembering, the makeup of the community itself (the people who live within its spatial boundaries) can be decidedly transient or temporary themselves.

Streets, neighbourhoods, wards and authority areas in their entirety might classify as place-based communities, as might places of work for some theorists. However, Keep Britain Tidy would prefer to think of the latter as a community of interest.

***"There is the Bangladeshi Women's Society, the Afro-Caribbean Society, the British Legion. There are all these segregated little clubs but there is never anything (for the whole community)."***

*Resident, Partner Local Authority*

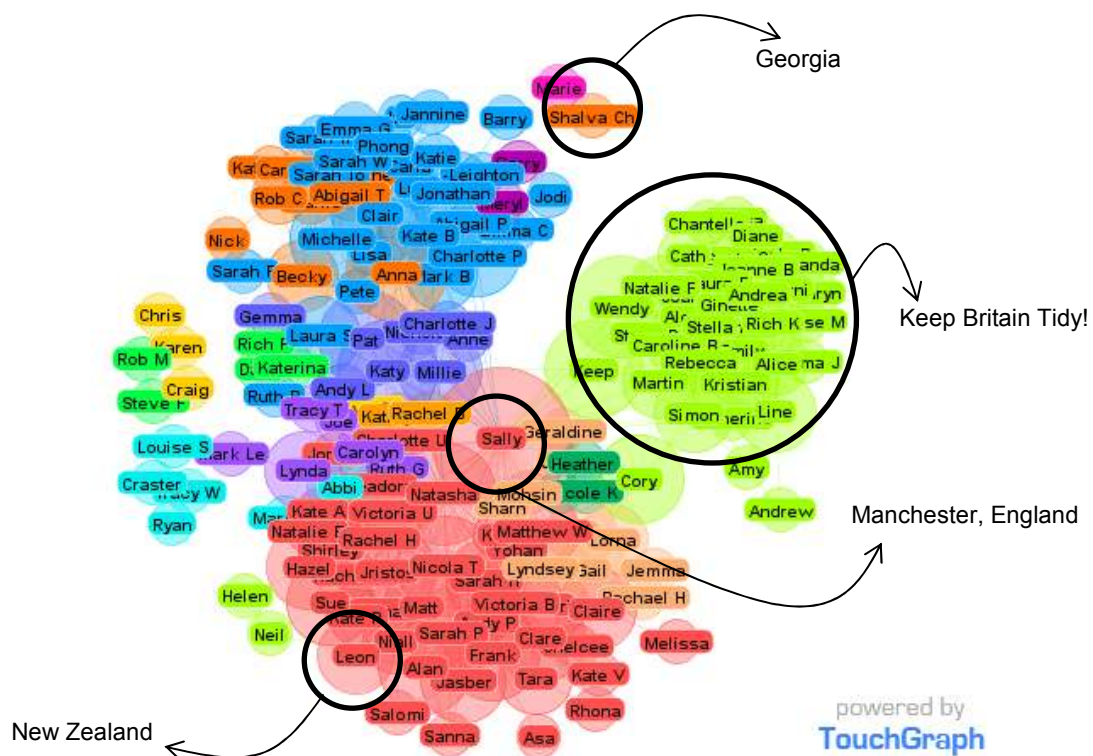
A **community of interest** is a community founded upon a common identity or activity. Communities of interest might exist temporarily at events like Glastonbury music festival for instance or a Star Trek convention. This category might also include social groups (e.g. mother and

toddler, gyms or schools), professional groups, virtual or online communities and religious congregations.

Of course, a community of interest is not exclusively bound by its geography and, thanks to social networking websites like Facebook, Bebo and Twitter, most of us now belong to communities with truly global possibilities.

Take a look at the visualisation of a colleague's Facebook community below.

**Figure 2: A Facebook-generated 'Global Community'<sup>30</sup>**



The visualisation is generated by software freely available online and works by clustering the contacts in our colleague's 'Friends' list. It does this by determining how many of the contacts are in photos with one another – thus determining how friends are in touch with other friends and so on. In short, the visualisation allows us to see how our colleagues friends are 'connected' and how they cluster. A good

<sup>30</sup> "Facebook" is a registered trademark of Facebook, Inc. All rights reserved. Image created using TouchGraph - <http://www.touchgraph.com/TGFacebookBrowser.html>

example of this clustering in action – we have highlighted the Keep Britain Tidy subgroup to the right of the image.

In addition, we have highlighted some of the more ‘exotic’ locations of our colleague’s friends. Indeed, despite her physical location in the North West of England, she is able to engage directly, on a daily basis, with people from as far afield as New Zealand and Georgia.

It is likely you are now beginning to see that community is not an easy thing to define! To help, we’d like to suggest another way of thinking about these community defining building blocks.

Throughout this report Keep Britain Tidy will refer to spatial communities as ‘places’ and to communities of interest as ‘people’. We hope later to use these definitions to think around engagement with, and ‘investment’ from within, deprived communities. We will also use these definitions of community when considering their residents’ likelihood to participate in social action. Table 2 then summarises the typical characteristics of these different types of communities, as we see them.

**Table 2: Community characteristics**

WHAT IS COMMUNITY?	
Places	People
Geographical / Spatial	Shared Interest / Identity / Routine
Physical	Emotional
Shared Spaces: More Tangible	Shared Values: More Cohesive
More Permanent (with transient elements)	More Temporary (but can be recurrent)

So, here we have the typical characteristics of a community founded on *place* and a community founded on *people*. But we must ask ourselves, are we safe to assume that because these communities exist at all that they are somehow, by definition, bound to get along? The simple answer is, absolutely not! Indeed, it is important that we concede we do not want to fall in to the trap of romanticising the concept of community (even if our residents can do as you will see later!). On the contrary, we recognise, as theorists have already suggested, that the term ‘community’ can sometimes encourage people to assume that there is a kind of inherent internal

coherence that is, frankly, very rare.<sup>31</sup> (However, we would like to argue that communities founded on people are more inclined to be cohesive than those founded on place simply because of their shared interest – whatever that might be.) With this in mind Keep Britain Tidy feel it is important to consider the role of both community and community cohesion<sup>32</sup> in our analysis of the impact of deprivation on perceptions.

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<sup>31</sup> Paddison, R. (2001) *Communities in the City* in Paddison, R. (Ed.) (2001) *Handbook of Urban Studies*, London: Sage cited in Camina, M. (2004) *Understanding and engaging deprived communities*. Home Office

<sup>32</sup> According to the Local Government Improvement and Development website, community cohesion is, “what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. People all want to fulfil their potential and feel that they belong and contribute to their local area.” For more on community cohesion see the Local Government Improvement and Development website at <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8799335>

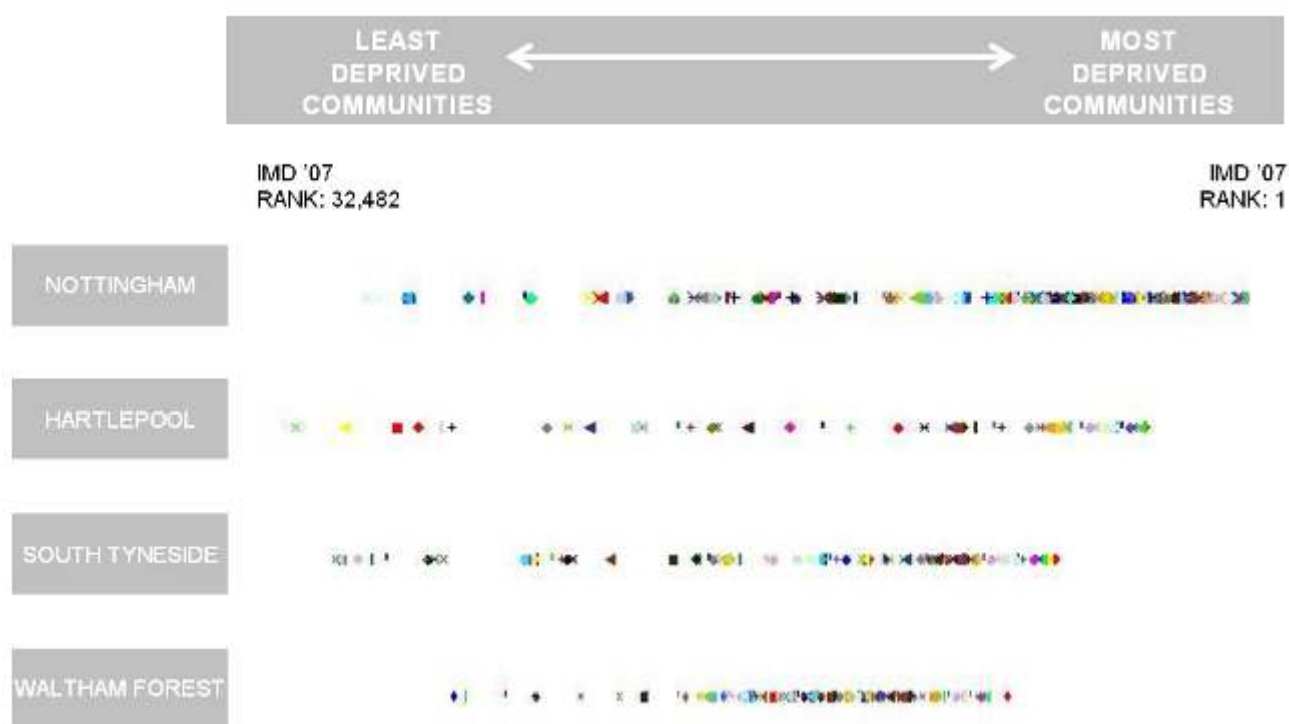
## **PART ONE**

### **Understanding the Impact of Deprivation on Perceptions: The Keep Britain Tidy Scale of Deprivation**

### Deprivation in the Research Areas

The demographic makeup of the boroughs we visited - Nottingham, Hartlepool, South Tyneside and Waltham Forest - naturally vary but all of them, as with any local authority area, have a population that scatters across a continuum between the more affluent and the more deprived. (To better demonstrate the point, this scattering is visualised below using 2007 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data and because it looks like DNA to us, we have called it Deprivation DNA!)<sup>33</sup>

**Figure 3: The Deprivation DNA of the Research Areas**<sup>34</sup>



*This image is for visualisation purposes only and is therefore not to scale.*

We should note that IMD data actually ranks areas according to differing levels of deprivation. This is why the DNA in our visualisation runs from least deprived communities on the left to the more deprived communities on the right and not from

<sup>33</sup> You will notice all of the boroughs have heavy scattering towards the more deprived end – IMD data was just one of the indicators used to source the boroughs used in this piece of research. See the Introduction to this report for more detail on how the research partners were selected.

<sup>34</sup> The IMD DNA was calculated using 2007 Indices of Multiple Deprivation data. The index was developed by Communities and Local Government and combines a number of indicators which cover income, employment, health and disability, education, skills and training, housing and access to services into a single deprivation score for each area. For reference Nottingham's ranking range from 36 (where 1 is the most deprived) to 25,264 (where 32,482 is the least deprived), Hartlepool's rankings range from 241 to 29,566, South Tyneside's rankings range from 557 to 28,829 and Waltham Forest's range from 634 to 22,673.

most affluent to most deprived. For clarity, an absence of deprivation according to IMD does not necessarily equate to the presence of affluence and, given that people like binary opposites, it is important that we highlight this fact and work to the 'least to most deprived rule' throughout our own report.

So, over the course of following pages we share our analysis of the many potential 'points of impact' deprivation can have on perceptions, using the findings collated from the boroughs we visited. And in order to assist practitioners who may wish to utilise these findings in a more streamlined fashion, we have gone some way to mapping them conceptually using the Deprivation DNA continuum as a kind of 'scaffold'. The result is something we have labelled the Keep Britain Tidy Scale of Deprivation (see the visualisation at the centre of this publication).

### **The Keep Britain Tidy Scale of Deprivation**

The Keep Britain Tidy Scale of Deprivation explores aspects of community life, feelings of influence and the factors most likely to 'swing' perceptions, and it considers all of these things as they shift and correlate with degrees of deprivation.

Now, before we go on to detail the makeup of the Keep Britain Tidy Scale of Deprivation there are two key points for us to consider:

Firstly, we should note that during the fieldwork stages of the research process our focus was always the impact of more pronounced deprivation on perceptions of place. As a result we have a much stronger sense of what *drives* perceptions in the more deprived communities. This is why we differentiate our Scale of Deprivation from our later focus on what *drives* perception of place.

Secondly, Keep Britain Tidy would like to make it clear that this scale works best, as we have already hinted, when viewed as a form of continuum – fluid and not rigid in its interpretations of the impact of deprivation on perception. As such, the perceptions (and occasionally behaviours) we discuss in our explanations of the Scale of Deprivation represent what we will call **Perception Principles**. **Perception Principles** are indicative of the most common perceptions one is likely to find at either extreme of the scale, but neither exhaustive nor uniform in reality.

In other words, to borrow a term, they should be considered 'rules of thumb' - useful signposts but certainly not concrete.

## Keep Britain Tidy Scale of Deprivation Perception Principle #1

### People & Places

#### Community ties, communications and civic engagement

Research preceding the Perceptions of Place Project has already demonstrated to us how important factors affecting the local environmental quality of a neighbourhood can be in engendering a sense of community.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, there is also evidence to suggest that people from more deprived neighbourhoods are more likely to experience noticeably severe local environmental quality issues.<sup>36</sup>

Previous research conducted by Keep Britain Tidy has also served to highlight the impact a sense of community or community spirit has on people's overall quality of life.<sup>37</sup> Work elsewhere has pointed out the impact perceptions of low community cohesion (and adverse psychosocial factors, including self-assessed level of health and a more general tendency towards a pessimistic world view) have on perceptions of place.<sup>38</sup>

In summary, community is important and the impact of local environmental quality on community is cyclical. That is to say, low perceptions of community (or community cohesion) results in poorer perceptions of place and poor perceptions of place have a significant impact on people's feelings of community.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, one of the first things we noticed in our discussion groups with residents (who came from various locations across all four boroughs) was that there was some contrast in how those from the more deprived areas and

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<sup>35</sup> Iacopini, G. (2009) *Word on the Streetscene: Transforming local neighbourhoods*. London: New Local Government Network

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2005) *Cleaning up neighbourhoods: Environmental problems and service provision in deprived neighbourhoods*. London: The Policy Press

<sup>37</sup> Keep Britain Tidy (2007) *Measuring Quality of Life: Does Local Environmental Quality Matter?* Copies of this report are available via the Keep Britain Tidy website – [www.KeepBritainTidy.org](http://www.KeepBritainTidy.org). See also Ipsos MORI (2010) *One world, many places; Citizen's views of municipal government and local areas across the world*. The report states that social cohesion is important - citizens in countries where people from different backgrounds are perceived to get on well together tend to be more satisfied with their local area – particularly in more developed countries. The report is available in full online at <http://fwd4.me/oneworld>

<sup>38</sup> Kamphuis, C. B. M., et al. (2010) 'Why do poor people perceive poor neighbourhoods? The role of objective neighbourhood features and psychosocial factors.' *Health and Place* 16, 744-754

<sup>39</sup> It is pleasing to note then that the 2009-10 Citizenship Survey reports that 85% of people thought their community was cohesive. This measure is determined by the number of people who agree that their local area was a place where people from different backgrounds got on well together; 76% felt they belonged strongly to their neighbourhood. The Citizenship Survey: 2009-10 was produced by Communities and Local Government in July 2010 and is available in full on their website.



those from the less deprived areas described their interaction with and, more pertinently, their sense of responsibility towards their 'community'.

Broadly speaking, residents from more deprived areas were more likely to describe their communities as *people* orientated spaces. Indeed, without prompting, they frequently stated that having friends and family near to them contributed to their overall feelings of happiness, pride and even feelings of safety. In terms of behaviours, this perception appeared to engender a positively held sense of responsibility to other people living in their neighbourhood. Indeed, residents frequently looked after their neighbour's homes while they were away, took care of one another's children or took rubbish out for elderly people who lived nearby.<sup>40</sup>

*The neighbours are really friendly and look out for each other. Nice friendly neighbours keeping an eye on everybody.*

*We keep an eye out for each other. We put each other's bins out; we'll pull them back in when they've been emptied things like that. So, in our cul-de-sac - I don't know about the rest of them - but we do tend to look after each other.*

In contrast, the residents who came from the less deprived neighbourhoods demonstrated a tendency to conceptualise their 'community' quite differently and, in turn, this tended to impact on the ways in which their sense of responsibility towards it was manifested in their behaviours.

In the less deprived areas, people based communities were evident and were certainly considered important, but the reach of people's social networks within their neighbourhoods was more constrained. In other words, residents from the least deprived areas were less likely to know

***“Where there is social housing and people aren't working, there's going to be more local environmental quality issues - isn't there?”***

*Resident, Partner Local Authority*

people more than one or two doors from their own properties (if that). This is

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<sup>40</sup> And this is great news because studies have shown that the simple act of talking to your neighbours can significantly impact on your overall feelings of wellbeing. Cited in Bacon, N., et al. (2010) *The State of Happiness: Can public policy shape people's wellbeing and resilience?* London: The Young Foundation

perhaps, in part, due to the fact that they were also more likely to leave their neighbourhood to work or socialise in other localities with people from other neighbourhoods.<sup>41</sup> And, because of this, residents from the less deprived areas tended to exhibit more frequently was the perceptual principle that it was important to demonstrate a sense responsibility to their *place* based community, or to the physicality of their residential location.

*I go round the car park with a bin every Monday. I get a bin full of rubbish.*

*We've got a gentleman in the village that actually grows his own plants and plants (them) out up along the street. Now not many people know that it's actually (him and) not the council. He comes and waters them every day.*

Importantly then, as you can see, this variation did manifest itself most prominently in how people talked about their motivations to 'get involved' or to take part in (formal and informal) activities that aimed to improve the local environmental quality of their neighbourhoods (e.g. litter picking, bulb planting etc.). So, this goes some way towards helping us think about triggers to social action at either end of the scale.

For residents from less deprived areas, engendering the feeling that they will be improving their physical surroundings is likely to be the best motivator to civic engagement. So, maybe we should be highlighting the tangible benefits to good standards of local environmental quality and consider promoting more actively the economic impact of good LEQ (e.g. the effect on property prices of clean and well-maintained green spaces<sup>42</sup>) or the benefits of positive 'objective' neighbourhood conditions on people's overall quality of life or improvements to health and wellbeing through increased use of public space and so on, and using these as triggers to engagement.

For residents from the more deprived areas, it is the close relationships or bonds they develop with other people in their neighbourhood that are most likely to instigate feelings of responsibility to their community. So, the trigger to engagement is likely to

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<sup>41</sup> And of course, there is some concern that deprived areas lack the facilities and links required to access wider networks. See Camina, M. (2004) *Understanding and engaging deprived communities*. London: Home Office. Camina writes, 'The underprivileged have to face difficulties with little access to solutions to problems outside their neighbourhood or through commercial services.'

<sup>42</sup> See Green Flag Plus Partnership (2009) *People, Places and their Green Spaces: A segmentation of people who use green spaces* which can be located online at [http://www.keepbritaintidy.org/greenflag/ImgLibrary/GreenSpaces\\_8204.pdf](http://www.keepbritaintidy.org/greenflag/ImgLibrary/GreenSpaces_8204.pdf)

be only subtly different but will need to promote more experience driven or empathetic gains. In other words, maybe the focus here should be in better tailoring the message or in *localising, emotionalising* and *personalising* the call to action.<sup>43</sup> This might be achieved by highlighting the impact of poor perceptions of place and of poor 'objective' neighbourhood conditions on the more vulnerable individuals in their social networks (particularly those living within their geographical or spatial community). Indeed, regardless of levels of deprivation there are already numerous philosophical arguments out there that suggest we should focus on cultivating a sense of a 'common cause' as a way to encourage better environmental behaviours.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, and we at Keep Britain Tidy recognise this from our own research, it is already formally acknowledged that people from deprived communities are more likely to participate in community activities if they feel things are already beginning to improve.<sup>45</sup> At Keep Britain Tidy we call this the '*momentum motivator*' and it has particular relevance to the Big Society agenda. As such we will return to this concept later.

A second general signposting trend, witnessed among the residents consulted, (important if we are to better engage residents who conceptualise community as *place* or *people* driven) were the peaks and troughs in official lines of 'community informing' that appeared to correlate with levels of deprivation.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, during the research process, Keep Britain Tidy's researchers noticed an unfortunate and fairly wide ranging tendency to distrust bodies of authority. It was agreed, however, that this general air of caution seemed to be compounded amongst those living in more deprived communities.

*You can't believe a word they say.*

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<sup>43</sup> Keep Britain Tidy wouldn't be the first to see the links here to the coalition government's Big Society agenda. For an interesting discussion on the emotional needs of social networks see Keller, M. *Cigarettes, Loneliness and the Big Society*. London: Demos – accessed online August 2010: <http://demos.co.uk/blog/cigaretteslonelinessandthebigsociety>

See also Docherty, I., et al. (2001) 'Civic culture, community and citizen participation in contrasting neighbourhoods.' *Urban Studies* 38, 2225-2250. Docherty et al. found that the deprived areas they looked at had strong ties with family and friends, but that they had less trust in institutions – politicians and formal community groups. This level of trust depended on previous attempts to gain participation.

<sup>44</sup> See Thompson, J. (2010) *Edging towards enlightenment* accessed online August 2010 for an interesting discussion on this, see <http://comment.rsablogs.org.uk/2010/06/25/edging-enlightenment/>

<sup>45</sup> Docherty, I., et al. (2001)

<sup>46</sup> By community informing we mean the degree to which residents showed inclinations towards regular communication with authority bodies and their likelihood to report local environmental quality and related antisocial behavioural issues

*I'm an absolute cynic.*

We don't really know what the causes of this phenomenon are but we could speculate that generally poorer levels of local environmental quality coupled with a collective low self-esteem and decreasing feelings of empowerment (see Perception Principle #3) all merge to create the effect of increasingly internalised communications. If we stretch our analysis to include some of the neighbourhoods we visited<sup>47</sup>, this internalised communication went so far as to encourage community members to deal with all sorts of issues without the assistance of any authority body.

*I'd intervene; I wouldn't (report it).*

*If something happened you will find out who it is. If they steal (something) – it'll come back to you.*

Put simply, residents from more deprived communities displayed clear preferences to talk to each other about their concerns, regarding local environmental quality and related antisocial behavioural issues, and this was not always in a productive way. Equally, people from less deprived communities appeared more inclined to report the issues they faced via official channels (with varying degrees of success). Needless to say, these findings are important for considering how best to release the potential for communities to improve their neighbourhoods.

*If there are any problems you can go and get help. If you phone (the council) they'll come and (sort it out) for you. They're quite good, they come straight away.*

*If you do write a letter of complaint to the council you get a standardised reply (stating) further action will be taken but nothing gets done.*

Again, we can only speculate that those from less deprived communities behaved in this way because of their increasing self-esteem and feelings of empowerment (more on this later) but we also know that there is an increasing likelihood that they will simply have fewer social connections at a neighbourhood level. This, naturally,

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<sup>47</sup> Remember, PoPP comprises two programmes of work, running simultaneously. As well as working with four boroughs we also visited nine local authorities to understand and improve perceptions in specific neighbourhood areas. Information was gathered from residents and informed six months of targeted action in the area. It will be followed by further research with residents to assess the impact of the action on how they perceive their area

leaves them with little option but to air complaints to those people who are set up to both hear them and to do something about the problems reported.

Additionally, as the New Local Government Network (NLGN) has already suggested, we might speculate that deprived communities suffer confusion about standards and about the different roles and functions of the agencies there to assist them.<sup>48</sup> Certainly, some of Keep Britain Tidy's previous research has found that those living in less deprived areas are more likely to know who to contact about LEQ and related antisocial behavioural issues.<sup>49</sup>

Needless to say the implications of these alternative reporting practices are immense. Worryingly, it would appear that there is already an over reliance on public reporting in the field of local environmental quality and related antisocial behavioural issues. This heavy reliance of community informing, as others have already pointed out, can mean that local authorities are potentially not gathering an accurate view of where the issues are.<sup>50</sup> We compound this issue if we overlay it with the reality that those from deprived communities do not seem to see the act of reporting issues through the proper channels as an effective way to contribute to their local area (notwithstanding the fact that it will result in something being done to resolve the issues). Alternatively, we must recognise that for some, it is simply a lack of clarity regarding what acceptable standards are (low expectations) or who they should be reporting issues to.

***“They need to communicate more with the people who live here and find out what exactly they want.”***

*Resident, Partner Local Authority*

We are sure you would like to hear what the resident's we consulted with thought about these issues. The vast majority thought their local authority should come and talk to them! Indeed, people from deprived areas told us that they would prefer to speak to representatives from their council face to face about the local environmental

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<sup>48</sup> Iacopini, G. (2009), p 69

<sup>49</sup> Keep Britain Tidy (2009) *London: Its People and their Litter*. Report prepared for Capital Standards. Copies of this report are available via the Keep Britain Tidy website – [www.keepbritaintidy.org](http://www.keepbritaintidy.org)

<sup>50</sup> The New Local Government Network put it best. They argue that *'there (...) can be an over reliance on the community informing (...) responses can be based on who can shout the loudest rather than where the real problems are.'* See Iacopini, G. (2009), p 67

and related antisocial behaviour issues in their areas – perhaps as a means to overcome issues of trust and familiarity.

*There is one (person from the council) I think is making a bit of a difference. A woman (has) starting to come round and knock on people's doors and she's getting two fences built on our estate. It's where all the kids were (doing drugs).*

We hope our later analysis of perception drivers will help you to think about innovative ways of doing this.

So, in summary...

**Keep Britain Tidy Scale of Deprivation Perception Principle #1 states that levels of deprivation affect how people view their community, how they think about the role they play in their neighbourhood and the responsibility they feel towards the people who live there.**

**This has an impact on 'community informing', with more deprived communities preferring to talk to each other and those from less deprived communities more likely to report issues promptly through official channels. This Perception Principle also has implications for motivations or triggers to civic engagement with individuals from more deprived areas more motivated to help people and those from less deprived areas more motivated to improve places.**

## Keep Britain Tidy Scale of Deprivation Perception Principle #2

### Speed & Spaces

#### Understanding how perceptions travel through communities

Have you ever noticed how quickly a snippet of information can travel through a community? I suspect many of our readers will, at the very least, recall a time when they have noticed how quickly the information out there can become distorted!

Well, we have seen how influential perceptions of community can be - we have seen the impact the ways in which residents conceptualise community can have on their motivations to participate in any kind of civic activity and we have witnessed the effect it can have on residents' desire to communicate with authority bodies. However, at Keep Britain Tidy we thought it would be useful to take a step back and think for a while about the social environments in which these perceptions of community thrive. We have come to this conclusion because we wanted to know not just how perceptions are formed and why but also how they travel, if at all, and why some perceptions are more likely to be shared and discussed than others.

To help us to think about why this happens we want to explore activity within an individual's 'perception network' at either end of the Scale of Deprivation.

A perception network is simply a social network by another name. It is a network of people who are able to communicate their perceptions (in this instance of LEQ and related antisocial behavioural issues) with one another.

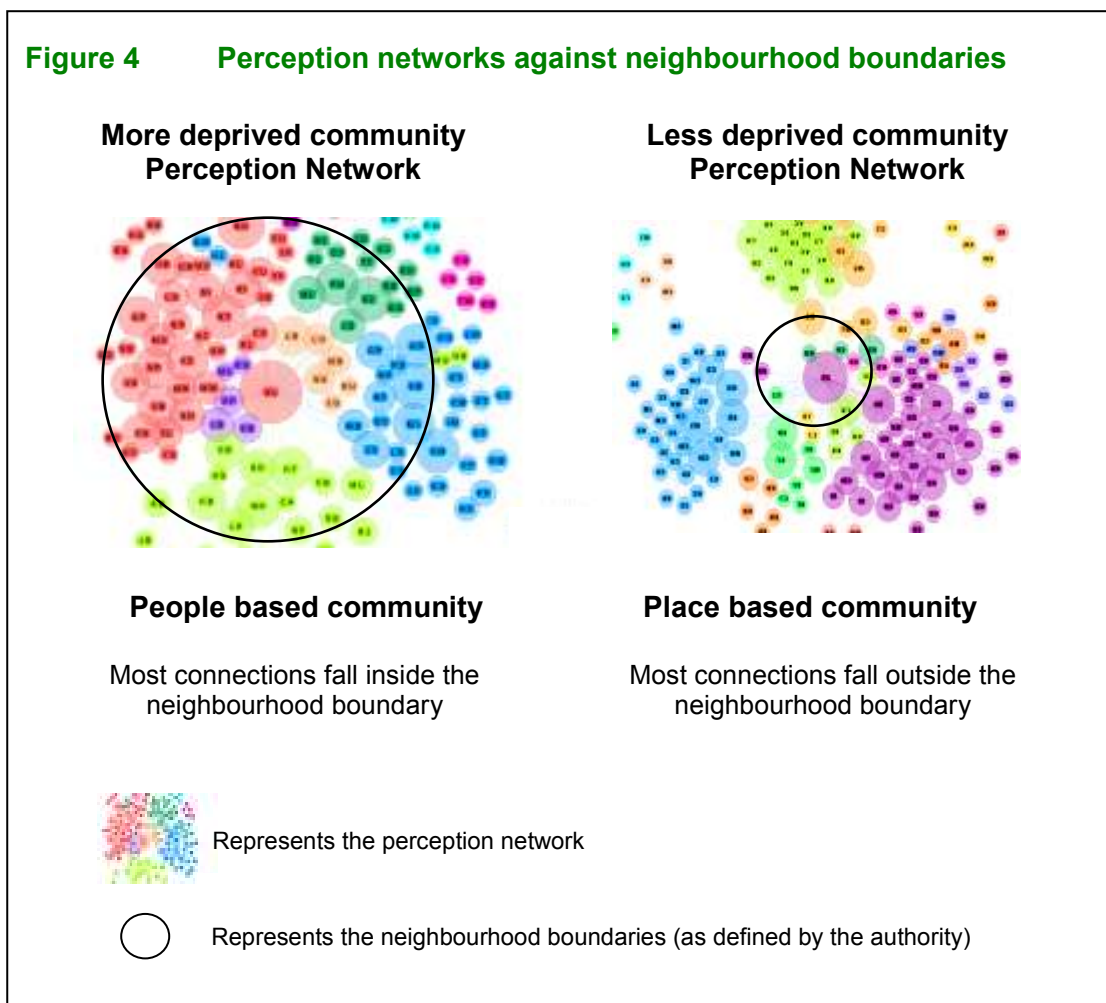
By renaming social networks as perception networks, we remind ourselves that networks are routes via which perceptions can be shared, influenced, sometimes altered and sometimes reaffirmed. We remind ourselves that perceptions are not fixed and that perceptions can be corrupted (for better or worse) by the presence of other people, and the opinions and influences they bring to any communicative interaction.

We should also recognise that perception networks are likely to vary in their composition between more and less deprived communities.

Let us explain what we mean by that.

In more deprived areas, where people were more likely to describe their communities as *people* orientated spaces, the majority of an individual's perception network is likely to fall inside of the boundaries of their neighbourhood. Certainly, an individual residing in one of our more deprived neighbourhoods was more likely to know a lot more people from their neighbourhood, than someone residing in one of our less deprived communities.

Correspondingly, in the less deprived neighbourhoods, where responsibility toward community was more likely to be expressed as a responsibility towards *place*, perception networks are more likely to spread beyond the geography of neighbourhood boundaries. However, the ties enjoyed within the neighbourhood itself are likely, overall, to be weaker (see Figure 4 for a visualisation of this network theory).





### Micro Memes: The power of an idea

Keep Britain Tidy believes that understanding how perceptions travel is of crucial importance if this research is going to be of practical use to those working to positively influence the perceptions of residents in neighbourhoods across the country. It is convenient then, that people living in deprived areas displayed stronger inclinations towards people based communities within their neighbourhoods - convenient because this people focus can serve to magnify the potential impact of perceptions at neighbourhood level.

To explore this statement in more detail we'd like to borrow a concept from biologist Richard Dawkins. Let us introduce to you the concept of the Meme (rhymes with beam).

In 1976, Dawkins wrote the book 'The Selfish Gene'.<sup>51</sup> In this book he conceptualised a human gene as a kind of 'replicator'. What he was basically saying is that genes are perpetuated by their ability to replicate (or reproduce) themselves by jumping from one body to another (not literally, but rather through human reproduction). In order to demonstrate that genes are not the only replicators, Dawkins had a look at what happens with 'ideas'. He considered the ways in which ideas travel from one *mind* to another to be similar to the genetic process and he determined that this also made them a type of replicator. He called the concept of ideas as replicators, Memes.

This seems a complicated theory we know, and there is a wealth of debate out there regarding Memes, but for our purposes let's just make sure we understand what Memes are!

Memes, like genes, are only interested in their survival. In order to survive they need us (humans) to carry them and spread them as far and wide as possible. In order to encourage us to do that all Memes need three basic characteristics. Firstly, they need to be memorable. Secondly, we need to be able to pass them on with minimum distortion. Thirdly, successful Memes will allow for unlimited replications of itself wherever possible.

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<sup>51</sup> New York City: Oxford University Press

So, to summarise – a Meme is an idea. A successful Meme is an idea people will remember and pass on with minimal distortion to an unlimited number of people.

Here are some examples of Memes you might recognise:

- Language (we didn't always have it - we haven't always needed it - but it evolved and it stuck because it had all the elements required to be a successful Meme. And, over everything else – it was useful!)
- Technology (from building a fire to the culture of the iPod)
- Fashion
- Proverbs
- Viral marketing (marketing that uses word of mouth)
- The practice of shaking hands with someone is a Meme (do you remember when you learned how and when it was best to do this?)
- Memes (yes, the concept of the Meme is a Meme in and of itself and we hope you will tell your friends about it once you have finished with our report!)
- And finally, toilet roll origami!



For more on toilet roll origami and Memes, you might like to watch Susan Blackmore's (pictured above) fantastic talk on Memes at <http://fwd4.me/blackmore>.<sup>52</sup>

During this talk Blackmore rightfully points out, we've all seen toilet roll origami somewhere in the world but we must really speculate as to its usefulness to the human race! Although we have to acknowledge that it is a very effective indicator that

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<sup>52</sup> Susan Blackmore argues that humanity has spawned a new kind of Meme, the Teme, which spreads itself via technology. Her talk was given at the annual TED Conference in February 2008. TED is a small non-profit organisation devoted to 'Ideas Worth Spreading'. It started out in 1984 as a conference bringing together people from three worlds: technology, entertainment and design (TED).

a public bathroom as been cleaned the toilet roll origami example we have borrowed does, nevertheless, neatly demonstrate that a Meme does not always have to be a groundbreaking (or particularly useful) idea!

So, there you have it - the concept of the Meme in a nutshell. We hope that in sharing this concept we will have gone some way towards demonstrating the power of an idea and how heavily some ideas can influence a culture.<sup>53</sup> In doing this, we want to encourage you to think about perceptions in the same way and remember that, just as ideas can affect the culture of a society, so too can perceptions affect the culture of a community. With this in mind, we'd like to toy with the concept of the Meme to help us think more practically around some of our own findings.

We now know that people from more deprived neighbourhoods are more likely to internalise their communications within the boundaries of their neighborhood (see Perception Principle #1). We also know that the makeup of perception networks – that is the networks in which perceptions spread – differ between more and less deprived areas (see Figure 4). Therefore, using what we have learnt from the concept of the Meme, we would like to hypothesize: the way perceptions travel from mind to mind in more deprived communities varies significantly from the way they travel in less deprived areas.<sup>54</sup> This means that perceptions impact the culture of these communities - at a neighbourhood level - in different ways.

We'll try to put that a different way and say that we believe, because of the likelihood to internalise communications (in part, as a result of their more geographically compact perception networks), ideas originating in deprived communities have limited geographical travel and influence. Because of this, they operate as what you might call a kind of 'Micro-Meme' - a Meme that exists only at a very localised level; one that in most cases won't be memorable enough or of interest to people from outside of the neighbourhood it originated from.

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<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, in the time it has taken us to compile this report, some of the researchers from Keep Britain Tidy have been to see the latest Christopher Nolan film, *Inception*. If you have seen it too, the concept of Memes may seem all the more familiar. Do you remember Leonardo DiCaprio's opening line? "What's the most resilient parasite? An idea." This precedes a story that focuses on one man's desire to seed an idea in another man's mind undetected. See *Inception* (2010) Dir. Christopher Nolan. USA: Warner Bros

<sup>54</sup> We must note that we do not assume verbal communications are the best and only way to 'transmit' a Meme. We are simply observing that in our experience of the places we visited over the course of the project, word of mouth was an incredibly powerful stimulus to perception forming and expression – for more on this read the Keep Britain Tidy Perception Wheel discussed later in the report

For clarity, we should remind ourselves where all this fits within the Keep Britain Tidy Scale of Deprivation.

At the more deprived end of the scale we have perceptions travelling around perception networks in which most connections fall inside the boundaries of a neighbourhood. As a result the perceptions travel with increasing intensity and can have considerable impact on the culture of a neighbourhood.

***"In our area, we know before they put (it in) the (local paper)."***

*Resident, Partner Local Authority*

At the other end, in the less deprived communities, we have perceptions travelling around perception networks in which most of the connections fall outside the neighbourhood boundaries. As a result these perceptions have a much less direct impact on neighbourhood's culture, but are far more likely to reach local authorities.

This may seem complicated so let's use an example to demonstrate the point.

Mr. Tidy lives in Habitat, a deprived neighbourhood. Mr. Tidy is retired and he keeps to himself. He doesn't participate in any formal community activities but he does know a lot of people in his neighbourhood - he has a dense perception network, the majority of which falls in to the boundaries of his neighbourhood. He looks after his immediate neighbour's house and cat whenever they are away and someone from the street parallel to his own puts his rubbish out for him when he is feeling under the weather.

Recently, Mr. Tidy has noticed that the alley at the back of his house has started to become more littered. He considers this increase in littering to be unacceptable and over the next few weeks he talks to more and more people in his perception network about it. He explains to each of the people he talks to that he thinks the council is failing to deliver the services his council tax pays for. Some of the people he talks to are touched by his story and agree with his sentiments. They tell people in their perception networks about Mr. Tidy and his worries and they embellish his story with details of their own negative experiences. Very quickly, the culture in Habitat is one of disappointment and distrust in the authority bodies supposedly there to help them.

The problem is that the council has not, at any point, been a part of this communication tree and is probably completely unaware of both the problem and the increasingly negative perceptions the problem has engendered.

Using the concept of the Meme to help us think about perceptions as units of information that 'travel' and spread, we begin to see how powerful perception networks can be - particularly in more deprived communities. One thing is certain, practitioners who are working to improve perceptions in these neighbourhoods could do worse than to consider ways in which they can become part of the perception networks that embellish them and allow them to travel so quickly.

### **Social Capital and Social Norms: Why what other people are doing is important**

We could not continue to explore the operations of perception networks, without some review of the concept of social capital. It is this theory that really helps us to understand that cohesive perception networks have real value for individuals, communities *and* practitioners.

It is widely appreciated that theorist Robert Putman has the best understanding of the concept of social capital and its relevance in today's world. Here's how he describes it:

*Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called 'civic virtue'. The difference is that 'social capital' calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.<sup>55</sup>*

To summarise, social capital relies on a sense of connectedness or a feeling of being connected to other people and it is assumed that people from areas with an abundance of social capital are likely to enjoy stronger feelings of influence and an overall better quality of life.

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<sup>55</sup> Putman is cited in Smith, M. K. (2001, 2007) 'Robert Putnam', *the encyclopaedia of informal education* located at <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/putnam.htm>

Perhaps easier to remember, Putnam himself provided us with shorthand when he characterised social capital as 'social glue'.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the concept of social glue has been picked up and used elsewhere numerous times; you may have come across it. We have come across headlines like, 'Facebook is "social glue" for university freshers'. This, interestingly, came from a story that served to highlight the value of social networking sites to new university students looking to build their social networks quickly – perhaps before they had even arrived on campus.<sup>57</sup>

In deprived communities, where individuals appeared to be very close to people in their neighbourhood, we have arguably seen high levels of 'social glue' and it is comforting to know this has previously been observed by researchers, in other organisations.<sup>58</sup> However, because this is not the only variable used to access the levels of social capital in a community, there is no universal correlation between social capital and deprivation.

In fact, it is widely estimated that areas of high deprivation suffer with *lower* levels of social capital overall. This is primarily because areas of social deprivation tend to be characterised by high levels of social disorganisation.<sup>59</sup>

So what are the variables to consider when thinking about social capital? Well, you might characterise an individual's social capital according to: their levels of civic engagement; formal and informal social networking; levels of trust they have in others; participation in activities helping others in their social network and group memberships. On the other hand, communities where social capital is more abundant will likely enjoy numerous voluntary associations (for the sick, the elderly and the unemployed amongst others), as well as a high population of individuals who feel obliged to help others, individuals who exhibit more trust in (and less fear of) other people in the community, individuals who are more confident and individuals who demonstrate a greater willingness to make use of community resources.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Putnam, R. D. (1995) 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', *The Journal of Democracy*, 6:1, 65-78

<sup>57</sup> See <http://www.physorg.com/news143200776.html>

<sup>58</sup> See [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/109339/aspirations\\_evidence\\_pack.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/109339/aspirations_evidence_pack.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> Social disorganisation has been described elsewhere as what happens when there is an absence of, or breakdown within, communal institutions (e.g. family, school, church and local government) and cooperative relationships among people. For more on the impact in deprived areas see McCarroll, L. (2008) 'A Qualitative Exploration of Teenage Leisure Time in Socially Deprived Areas of Belfast.' *Quest proceedings of the QUB AHSS Conference*, June 2008. Issue 6, Autumn 2008

<sup>60</sup> Coulthard, M., et al. (2002) *People's perceptions of their neighbourhood and community involvement: Results from the social capital module of the General Household Survey 2000* London: The Stationary Office, p 1

In short, what the concept of social capital does is highlight for us the connection between all these variables and feelings of influence, a sense of belonging, community and overall quality of life. It also helps us to spot how the connections in our perception networks can encourage or deter certain behaviours and bring about 'social norms'. For example, thinking more broadly about the influence of social capital, studies have been able to find a link between people's patterns of voting and social capital. Indeed, people are more likely to vote if they live in a place where other people vote and expect them to vote – that is where there is an established social norm of voting. In deprived communities, a decline in this particular norm has been blamed on the low social capital these areas can suffer with.<sup>61</sup>

Keep Britain Tidy thinks social norms are important. Indeed, researchers from all walks of life are beginning to think about the power of social norms and how they can be harnessed and used as drivers towards better behaviours and, much to our pleasure, more accurate perceptions.

Take for example the CHARM project, funded by the Research Council's UK Digital Economy programme. CHARM aims to change individuals' sustainability behaviours in socially desirable ways simply by telling them what other people do.<sup>62</sup> They explain:

*Social psychology research shows that our everyday activities are influenced by what we believe to be 'normal' behaviour. With this in mind, the social norm approach attempts to change behaviour in socially desirable ways by telling people what other people do. This approach has been successfully employed in the contexts of alcohol and substance abuse, and sustainability issues such as electricity consumption, recycling and hotel towel reuse.<sup>63</sup>*

Of course, what this practice does in reality is immediately call into question one's claim to social capital. If someone is not behaving like everyone else, are they failing to make the right social connections? If someone drops litter, do they feel bad if they

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<sup>61</sup> Keany, E., and Rogers, B. (2006) *A Citizen's Duty: Voter inequality and the case for compulsory turnout*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research

<sup>62</sup> Importantly, we know that there is a higher probability of someone littering in a littered setting when a lot of litter is present or when someone watches someone else littering. For examples see Cialdini *et al.* (1990) 'A Focus Theory of Normative Conduct: Recycling the Concept of Norms to Reduce Littering in Public Places' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58 (6)

<sup>63</sup> For more on the CHARM project see <http://www.projectcharm.info/>

are not one of the 79% of people who don't? <sup>64</sup> Do they feel like they are failing to be like most people and what impact, if any, does this have on their behaviour?

The practice of using social norms can also help to reduce misconceptions. Remember the *Teen Trouble* experiment that saw older respondents blame teenagers for 80% of total crimes? Is it not possible that a social norm campaign might go some way to helping to rectify this perception / reality gap, whilst reassuring young people that they are adhering to positive social norms when they do not engage in low level antisocial behaviour?<sup>65</sup>

There is a lot to think about here and a lot to digest. However, we do hope that thinking about these concepts helps to illustrate what can influence the way perception networks operate and the culture of a neighbourhood. We also hope they encourage people to use the Scale of Deprivation in more practical and useful ways.

Let us try and wrap this up for you.

**Perception Principle #2 states that the level of deprivation influences the makeup of 'perception networks' (a network of people through which an individual's perception may be shared), and therefore how perceptions travel through communities and how far they may reach.**

**This has an impact on the culture within a community and may also have implications for managing misconceptions in performance and service delivery.**

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<sup>64</sup> This encouraging statistic is taken from Keep Britain Tidy (2009) *The Word on our Street*. See Keep Britain Tidy website for copies of this report – [www.keepbritaintidy.org](http://www.keepbritaintidy.org)

<sup>65</sup> There are other examples: in 2008, a survey conducted by Ipsos MORI saw a huge over-estimation of teenage pregnancy in England - 28% of people thought 6-15% of girls under the age of 16 in England got pregnant each year (actual proportion is just 0.8%)



## Keep Britain Tidy Scale of Deprivation Perception Principle #3 Here, Now & in the Future

### Feelings of influence and strategies for feeling good!

The 2009-10 Citizenship Survey reports that just 37% of people felt they could influence decisions in their local area. This is significantly greater than the number of people who feel they can make a difference to Britain; just 20% of people felt they had any influence at all at this level.<sup>66</sup> And, research tells us that feelings of influence are important to people; there is a growing body of evidence to suggest feelings of influence can actually enhance feelings of wellbeing, for instance.<sup>67</sup>

So, as the final perception principle in the Scale of Deprivation, *Here, Now and in the Future* considers the impact deprivation can have on feelings of influence (and empowerment), whilst reviewing the strategies for positively influencing perceptions that are most likely to be effective at either end of the scale.

We should start by looking more closely at those feelings of influence statistics because, in actual fact, there are no significant differences between areas with different levels of deprivation (as defined by the Index of Multiple Deprivation) in people feeling able to influence local decisions *or* decisions affecting Britain. What the statistics do tell us, however, is that people in more deprived areas are less likely view their ability to influence local decisions as important.<sup>68</sup>

Crucially, given the increased drive toward localism, what we noticed in our conversations with residents were the differences in the way people from the more deprived communities conceptualised *where* they felt most empowered or able to exert influence (usually in self-defined micro-localities<sup>69</sup> or 'comfort zones' - the street where they live and so on) and *how* these perceptions tended to manifest themselves in their relationship to those authority bodies responsible for dealing with the issues. (The latter is best demonstrated in their tendency to internalise communication and deal with issues independently or without assistance from authorities.)

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<sup>66</sup> Citizenship Survey: 2009-10

<sup>67</sup> Bacon, N., et al. (2010) *The State of Happiness: Can public policy shapes people's wellbeing and resilience?* London: The Young Foundation, pp 72-73

<sup>68</sup> Taylor, E., & Low, N. (2010) *2008-09 Citizenship Survey: Empowered Communities Topic Report.* London: Department for Communities and Local Government

<sup>69</sup> We consciously borrow this particularly useful phrase from Iacopini, G. (2009)

*To make a difference you've got to have followers behind you. One person? I think I don't think it works like that, I think you need to get into a group. As an individual I don't think it makes a difference.*

In fact, what we quite quickly became aware of was that people from more deprived communities experienced ever decreasing feelings of empowerment (usually exhibited as a decreasing desire to exert influence) from the micro-localities within their neighbourhood to national level.

*Not to be rude or anything, (but) I would not dream of going up to area x to a community thing, because I don't know how I would be accepted.*

*You know like (someone has said) how we are a community in area y? (Well) our area isn't just one community, area x is a community (within it).*

However, the residents we consulted from the less deprived communities appeared to enjoy stronger feelings of empowerment and self confidence overall. As a result people from the less deprived areas appeared to have a greater desire to influence activity, through cooperation with the authorities, both in their local area and beyond. Take a quick look at Table 3 for an 'in focus' breakdown of this analysis.

*If you have any issues you can contact them and they will deal with the local issues.*

*They're telling you what's going to happen and if you've got a view on it (there is) a number you can contact.*

The question is not how to increase feelings of influence, but how do we increase the tendency for people from more deprived communities to see feelings of influence as important?

We certainly don't pretend to have all the answers but what we do know is that feelings of influence relate strongly to feelings of empowerment, confidence and self-esteem. As such, we would assert that the first challenge is to empower residents in deprived communities; providing them with the confidence they need in order to see feelings of influence as an important contribution to their overall quality of life. We see increasing involvement in civic engagement (both formal and informal) as the route to this ideal.

**Table 3: Manifestations of feelings of influence**

FEELINGS OF INFLUENCE			
How		Where	
<i>More Deprived</i>	<i>Less Deprived</i>	<i>More Deprived</i>	<i>Less Deprived</i>
Internalised communications or dealing with issues independently	More likely to report to authorities or communicate 'up'	At micro-locality level (self-defined 'comfort zones')	More likely to extend to borough / national level <sup>70</sup>

Indeed, there is what some might call a possible 'tipping point'<sup>71</sup> in this cultivation of seeing feelings of influence as important through involvement in civic engagement. Observed elsewhere, this tipping point is the point at which residents from deprived communities, in taking opportunities to participate in community activities, start to feel empowered. They are then able to both realise and recognise their own role in promoting positive change in their neighbourhoods. This recognition then increases their confidence in their ability to make a difference and, in turn, this escalates the likelihood that they will continue to participate in community activities. Indeed, they may even participate more.<sup>72</sup>

Of course, we recognise there are challenging leaps to make to ensure the appetite to participate is there in the first place!

The degree to which people from more or less deprived communities saw feelings of influence as important (and in some cases, how much or little influence they felt they actually had) appeared to have a direct impact on how they dealt with local environmental quality and related antisocial behaviour issues - that is to say what actions they took to deal with, modify, correct, share or simply process their

<sup>70</sup> For examples see McLean, S. and Anderson, E. (2009) *Activating Empowerment: Empowering Britain from the bottom*. London: Ipsos MORI. The report states, "Interest in politics is markedly lower in areas with greater deprivation: only 35% of residents in the most deprived 10% of areas in the country say that they are interested in politics, compared with 69% in the most affluent 10% of areas."

<sup>71</sup> See Gladwell, M. (2000) *The Tipping Point: How little things can make a big difference*. London: Abacus

<sup>72</sup> Adamson, D. and Bromiley, R. (2008) *Community empowerment in practice: lessons from communities first*. London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Kitchen, S., et al. (2006) add, "There is evidence of a link between participation in civil renewal activities and whether people feel they can influence decisions. For example, people who participated in civic activism were more likely, than people who had not participated, to feel they could influence decisions affecting the local area." - 2005 Citizenship Survey: Cross Cutting Themes. London: Department for Communities and Local Government

perceptions. We will call this the process of ‘perception gratification’ (the shorthand for which might just simply be how they made themselves feel better or the ‘*Feel Good Factor*’).

These differences can be characterised as veering towards an ‘operational’ focus, at the more deprived end of the scale, and towards more ‘strategic’ aims, at the less deprived end. To explain, residents from more deprived areas tended to be much more concerned about dealing with the everyday realities of local environmental quality issues in their neighbourhood, than they were about realising long term solutions to any issues they might face. This phenomenon is likely to be a result of competing priorities as Margaret Camina, for the Home Office, describes:

*Local environments are not sealed but linked to wider networks and there is concern that deprived neighbourhoods lack these links. This may make communities more defensive and preoccupied with short-term coping and survival strategies.*<sup>73</sup>

The result is a focus on outputs in deprived communities – or what you might call a propensity towards instant gratification. Residents simply want to see the issues dealt with (for example, the quick removal of dog fouling or consistently clean streets). In contrast, residents from the less deprived communities were far more likely to display a willingness to ‘delay gratification’ or focus on more strategic, long-term approaches to local environmental issues if this meant the problem would be, eventually, eradicated (for example, the introduction of dog fouling bins and dog wardens or campaigning to highlight the impact of damaging environmental behaviours). Of course, we recognise there are numerous variables that will work to contribute to this fact (not least the reality that people from more deprived communities are more likely to experience more severe local environmental problems<sup>74</sup>) but these are useful perspectives to bear in mind in any engagement with deprived communities.

Indeed, one final point to note regarding the impact of this input/output perception gratification trend, between less and more deprived communities, is their relationship to civic engagement motivators and, by association, routes to increased feelings of influence. Unsurprisingly, the tendency among residents from more deprived areas to focus on short-term, output focused solutions to local environmental issues can mean

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<sup>73</sup> Camina, M. (2004) *Understanding and engaging deprived communities*. London: Home Office

<sup>74</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2005)

there is an inclination to get involved in authorities that make a difference only at the micro-locality level.

You are probably wondering, 'Isn't any involvement beneficial?' Well, the short answer is yes, of course. Our only caveat would be to ensure practitioners recognise that consistently engaging in what is most likely to be informal activity at a micro-level will have significantly less impact on increasing feelings of influence than more formal opportunities toward civic engagement at neighbourhood or even borough level – a fact that could serve to continually limit a residents' scope or sphere of influence.<sup>75</sup>

So...

**Perception Principle #3 states that levels of deprivation can have an impact on how empowered people feel to deal with issues, with people from more deprived communities less likely to consider feelings of influence an important part of community life.**

**Equally, levels of deprivation can influence the way that people expect authorities to resolve their concerns. For instance, people from less deprived communities are more likely to feel good when they can see the 'causes' of an issue are being dealt with, while people from more deprived communities are happiest when the 'effect' of a problem is removed from their streets.**

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<sup>75</sup> We already know 'active members of (deprived) communities often felt less directly engaged in strategic, thematic approaches than they had been in neighbourhood based programmes.' Fyfe, S., et al. (2009) *Informing Future Approaches to Tackling Multiple Deprivation in Communities: Beyond the Fairer Scotland Fund*. Scottish Government Social Research, p iv

## **PART TWO**

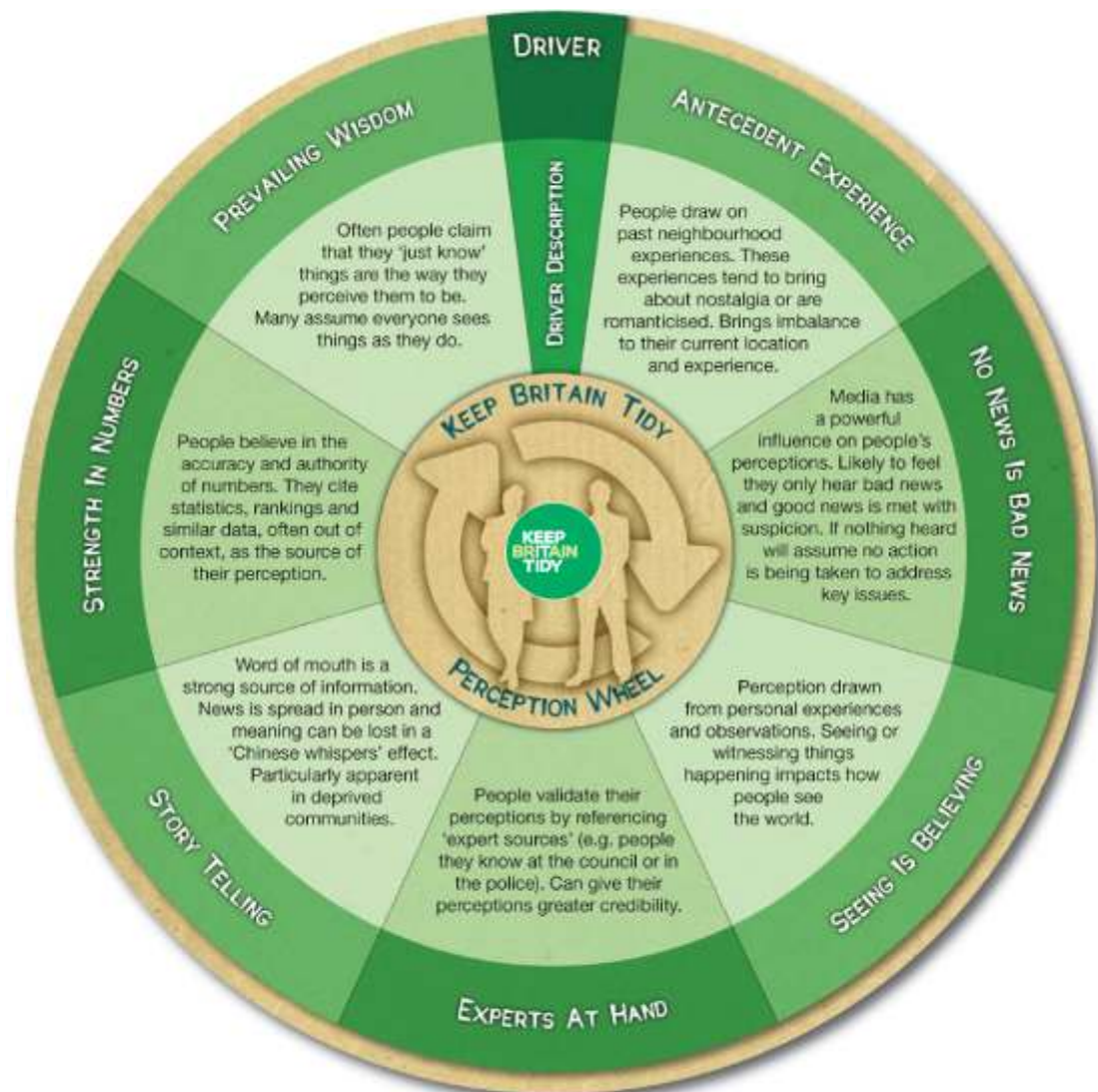
### **Understanding what *Drives* Perceptions: The Keep Britain Tidy Perception Wheel**

## Why consider perception drivers?

During the research process, Keep Britain Tidy observed considerable recognition amongst residents themselves that their perceptions heavily influenced their experience of living in an area, their relationships to their community and the way they described the experience to other people. With this in mind, we now aim to demonstrate that understanding what *drives* these perceptions is not just useful, it is crucial.

To do this we have devised a model, both practical and informative, that summarises the primary drivers of perceptions (of local environmental quality and related antisocial behaviour) evident among the residents consulted for this piece of research. This model is called the Keep Britain Tidy Perception Wheel and can be seen below.

## The Keep Britain Tidy Perception Wheel



What follows then is a detailed review of the overall perception drivers we summarise within the Perception Wheel; drivers civil society organisations and local government practitioners will wish to be aware of and drivers they can anticipate encountering (and may well have already encountered) in the communities they work with. We will follow this analysis with practical suggestions for how you can begin to deal with each driver in turn. To make life a little easier for you, these ideas are summarised at the close of the section in the *Perceptions Change Wheel*.

### Other Influences: A note about the centre of the wheel

After detailed analysis **seven drivers** of perception were identified amongst the residents consulted. However, we should note that, based on our literature review and contextual research, Keep Britain Tidy's researchers made the decision very early on to default to the educated assumption that many demographic and socio-economic factors influence perception too. That is to say that we recognise perception can be influenced heavily by a person's unique corporeal (bodily) experience and social position.

To help explain, let's consider one of the most striking examples of the way demographic and socio-economic factors can impact perception - the so-called 'fear-risk paradox'. It may come as some comfort that this is a paradox still puzzling criminologists all over the world!

In summary, the fear-risk paradox sees those least at risk of being the victim of a crime (women and the elderly) consistently expressing the highest degrees of fear. Interestingly, research confirms that although men are more at risk of being the victim of a crime, women report fear levels that are three times that of men.<sup>76</sup> There are multiple theories as to why this is<sup>77</sup>, but for our purposes let us just accept the need to recognise that gender and age have a significant impact on perceptions of safety.

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<sup>76</sup> See Jackson, J. (2008) 'Bridging the social and the psychological in the fear of crime' in *Fear of Crime: Critical Voices in an Age of Anxiety*. Oxon: Routledge and also Stanko, E. *The Commercialisation of Women's Fear of Crime* - online at <http://fwd4.me/Stanko>

Incidentally, British Crime Survey in 2007/08 showed that young men, aged 16 to 24, were most at risk at being the victim of a crime, with 13.4% experiencing a violent crime of some sort in the year preceding the interview, compared with 6.4% of women of the same age. Source: *British Crime Survey 2007/08*, Home Office; Criminal Statistics, 2006, Ministry of Justice)

<sup>77</sup> See Smith, W. R. and Torstenson, M. (1997) *Gender Differences in Risk Perception and Neutralizing Fear of Crime; Toward Resolving the Paradoxes*. British Journal of Criminology. It explains "Why the least victimised by violence (e.g. women and elderly) are most fearful, is a central paradox in the fear of crime literature." Four attempts to resolve the paradox are discussed: hidden victimisation of women; greater tendencies of women to recall early life-course experiences, and to generalise fear from one context to another and from one type of victimisation to another; vulnerability of women; and male discounting of fear. For more on this see Sutton, R. M., and Farrall, S. (2004) *Gender, Socially Desirable Responding and the Fear of Crime*. British Journal of Criminology.



Knowing this, we like to think of the individual at the centre of our wheel as the filter through which all perceptions must go. In reality, what this means is that our perception drivers are only ever indicative. In serious consideration of their effects at an individual level, one must consider a person's demographic and socio-economic influences in conjunction with the driver at all times.

Now we have that cleared up, let's take a look at each of the seven drivers identified in turn.

## Perception Driver #1 Antecedent Experience

The Wheel in detail: **“Residents bring to any area memories of past neighbourhood experiences. These experiences are frequently romanticised or tempered with nostalgia for ‘times gone by’. This tends to bring imbalance to views of their current location and experience.”**

Residents tended to refer to previous experiences and generational disparities in their points of view, when they expressed dissatisfaction with elements of living in their local area and the wider borough. As stated in the Perception Wheel, residents frequently romanticised the past (accurately or otherwise) and this tended to increase the likelihood that there was a negative temperament to their present day perceptions of things.<sup>78</sup>

*Years ago you could leave your front door open, your back door open and you could go to the shops and you’d know that your house was safe.*

*Everything’s changed. I used to play football until 10 o’clock at night. You made sure your garden was clean. Everybody knew each other and I can remember being seven or eight years old playing, running, kicking a ball at night. My kids now wouldn’t dream of (doing that) and I think it’s nationwide not just Nottingham. The whole country’s changed - for the worse.*

It is also true that this consistent reference to ‘times gone by’ could also have a positive impact on perceptions, although this was a rarity in comparison. This is because, for antecedent experience to operate in this way, it relied more on individual experiences and recollections and less on the more collective sway towards thinking things are not what they used to be. In other words, it was less a pattern of behaviour in the groups and was much more dependent on the individual. It was, therefore, far less likely to be influenced by other factors on the Perception Wheel.

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<sup>78</sup> We recognise that this is a fairly fundamental observation and that it is certainly a tough driver to do anything about. For an interesting analysis of the history of perceiving the ‘ways things were’ see Pearson, G. (1983) *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears*. London: Palgrave Macmillan

*Well, where I was born it's like the back of beyond so (here) I can get from A to B. You know, there are shops whereas there's nothing where I come from. There's no bus service, no train service and one shop. Here you can go all over the place, get on a tram or a bus or walk. I'm quite happy there.*

Typical attitude / opinion: **"Everything's changed over the years."**

Recommended nudge: **Dispel myths and, wherever you can, encourage people not to romanticise the past. One way to do this is by flipping nostalgic messages – why is the present better than the past? Another consideration is to use people's feelings of nostalgia to encourage them to participate more in social action and community activities.**

A considerable amount of work has been already been done to identify how feelings of nostalgia (or a desire to return to the past) can influence behaviour – particularly that of consumers.<sup>79</sup> Researchers elsewhere have also considered how feelings of belonging or social connectedness can influence thoughts and behaviours and intensify feelings of nostalgia when absent.<sup>80</sup> Taking all this in to consideration, Keep Britain Tidy considers the first perception driver, Antecedent Experience, to be very useful to understand. Awareness of this driver enables practitioners to harness these sometimes powerful emotions to engage people in socially beneficial behaviours and activities.

As an example of where this kind of approach can work, consider the Eden Project's Big Lunch initiative. The Big Lunch plays on feelings of nostalgia, by using the positive mental associations people have between street parties and the feelings of togetherness that can be engendered through them at a community level (think about the Silver Jubilee in 1977 or VE Day, for example). The Big Lunch project is held annually for one day only and encourages people to get together with their neighbours for anything from a simple lunch to a full blown street party. The initiative

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<sup>79</sup> See Holbrook, M. B. (1993) 'Nostalgia and Consumption Preferences: Some emerging patterns of consumer taste.' *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20. Readers might also like to revisit certain advertising campaigns to see just how often nostalgia is used, to help products resonate with consumers. Interestingly, French car manufacturers, Citroen, recently attempted to play with this pull towards nostalgia by utilising images of John Lennon to promote their DS3 model. The 30-second advert sees Lennon say "Why all this nostalgia? Start something new. Live your life now."

<sup>80</sup> See Kopf, D. and Wolf, M. (2007) Nostalgia and the Need For Social Connectedness: Implications for Marketing Management at [http://www.swdsi.org/swdsi07/2007\\_proceedings/papers/837.pdf](http://www.swdsi.org/swdsi07/2007_proceedings/papers/837.pdf)

hopes to encourage people to talk to and engage with people in their community, who they might otherwise not engage with in a meaningful way. The Eden Project ingeniously call it, 'Human Warming'.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> See <http://www.thebiglunch.com/index.php> for more detail

## Perception Driver #2 No News Is Bad News

The Wheel in detail: **“Media influence on perception is evident and extremely powerful. Often residents will complain that they only hear the bad news. When they do hear good news, it is usually met with suspicion, particularly when the source has a vested interest in the positive reception of a story. However, the majority do not know about work that is being done to address key issues in their area, so they tend to assume nothing is actually happening.”**

Perhaps one of the most influential factors affecting perceptions, the residents we consulted would frequently cite local and national communications as the ‘source’ of their perceptions.

*You read the papers.*

*You see it on television.*

Furthermore, the majority remained sceptical of these communications. They complained that most of the information they were exposed to was either negatively posited (for example, residents in Nottingham felt the national media were still driving what they considered to be Nottingham’s poor reputation regarding levels of crime) or were injected with a degree of spin from the otherwise self-serving local authorities (particularly in communications disseminated directly by the council).

*Don’t you think the media has done all this to Nottingham? Gun capital of the world?*

*Where the hell do they get that from?*

*It’s not reality in my experience (stories in the press).*

*Waltham Forest News has a lot of good news in – but then it is for the council (so they can) promote what is going on.*

*Always read between the lines.*

A particularly salient example of how powerful the media can be in the formation of perceptions at a local level, we found residents were almost uniformly concerned about how local authorities allocated and spent public funds. In a time when MPs' expenses are a hot topic and we are all feeling the impact of these times of austerity, it was not surprising for us to note money was top of mind for most residents.

*It's on the news all the time (the council) love travelling at our expense.*

*They spent all the dough and couldn't afford to pay it back. Wasn't that on the news last week? That means that when I go to work tomorrow morning and my wages get paid into my bank, I'm paying yet more money for the big wigs that are taking a massive wage out each year.*

This segment of the Perception Wheel also highlights the impact communications (or a lack thereof) can have on perceptions of what is being done to tackle local environmental quality and related antisocial behaviour. Indeed, perhaps unsurprisingly, a low awareness of council initiatives and activities correlated absolutely to a perceived lack of action. So, naturally, this low awareness of initiatives resulted in particularly negative views of authority bodies.

***"Somehow, I feel as though (the council is) wasting my money."***

*Resident, Partner Local Authority*

*I don't like them. They don't do much for the community at all. They don't do anything.*

*The councillors aren't making the decisions. (They are) unaccountable as far as we're concerned; unaccountable for their actions.*

Equally, any perceived lack of communication was seen to extend to a lack of consultation. Residents frequently asserted that key figures from their local authority, who they would like to communicate with, were all too often 'out of reach'. Or they only appeared to make themselves available when the investment in the community brought about some sort of professional gain.

*For example the bins - when they changed the bins, well, it was terrible. There's no consultation they just basically (do) what they like.*

*I think it's closed doors. There's no transparency as to what decisions get made and what's going on.*

*Years ago, didn't you used to get someone from the elections used to come round and knock on your door? I can remember my mum speaking to them. If you showed me a picture now of such and such a person now I wouldn't know who it is; wouldn't have a clue.*

*You don't see (your local MP) until its voting.*

Typical attitude / opinion: **"You must always read between the lines."**

Recommended nudge: **Regularly use communications to tell your residents what activities and initiatives are underway in their area but respond specifically to their concerns (We asked. You said. We did). For more credibility use message champions – employ third party agencies / experts to relay positive messages about your organisation. Be transparent, admit to weaknesses and apologise when you are wrong – your residents will respect you more. Finally, be smart about how you schedule your press releases – sometimes less is more. You need to ask yourself, are there better, more joined up ways in which teams within your organisation can reach out to the local press?**

Keep Britain Tidy is not the first organisation to highlight the impact communications have on perception and we certainly won't be the last. In 2008, the Local Government Association (LGA) highlighted that there are clear links between the degree to which a resident feels informed and their satisfaction with their local authority.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, research conducted for Communities and Local

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<sup>82</sup> Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute (2008) *The Reputation of Local Government: Literature review to support the 'My Council' campaign.*

Government (CLG) has determined that, in general, residents are more positive in areas where their council has a good relationship with the local press.<sup>83</sup>

Our recommended nudges, however, look further into the residual issues. For example, we know from talking to residents that it is important *where* these messages come from and *who* delivers them. It is not enough for local authorities to simply present residents with positive stories. Instead practitioners must continue to build a brand for services, promising transparency and integrity. They must then support this with testimony from third parties; trusted champions who can verify that what's offered is what's being delivered. Needless to say, residents should also participate.

One recent communication success story has been the Love Lewisham campaign. This initiative works by enabling people to report local environmental quality issues in 'real time', using their smartphone or online, via a specially designed website. People are able to follow the progress of a report and are informed directly when an issue has been dealt with.

You might prefer to think of the Love Lewisham initiative as the 'We Asked. You Said. We Did.' for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and another step towards creating a Big Society. Residents are involved in the process of looking after Lewisham's streets 24/7 (if they choose) and, in return, they get that all important feedback and sometimes even a photographic image. Additionally, making themselves available on social networking sites put Lewisham Council in shouting distance of those all important perception networks, ensuring many residents are in a position to understand the magnitude of the issues faced by Lewisham Council.

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<sup>83</sup> Taylor, S. and Williams, B. (2006) *Perceptions of Local Government in England: Key findings from qualitative research*. London: BMG Research Ltd for Department for Communities and Local Government



**Lewisham**  
**Love Lewisham**

- ▶ Images
- ▶ Report Issues
- ▶ Your Account
- ▶ Contact Us
- ▶ How It Works
- ▶ Version 2!



Job has been completed  
[More Details Available](#)  
 16 August 2010  
 flytip  
 Fly-tip  
 bembridge house



Job has been completed  
[More Details Available](#)  
 16 August 2010  
 Flytip  
 Fly-tip  
 Millbank Way  
[map](#)



Job has been completed  
[More Details Available](#)  
 16 August 2010  
 flytip  
 Fly-tip  
 Whitcher Close  
[map](#)



**LoveLewisham**

@darryl1974 Your job has been completed. See 'after' image here;  
<http://bit.ly/92x00K>

about 23 hours ago via web in reply to darryl1974

@darryl1974 I'll keep a look out for your reports and follow them up with our Greenwich contacts. They seemed keen to make it work!  
 12:09 AM Aug 16th via Twittelator in reply to darryl1974

@darryl1974 hi Darryl, you can report stuff to Greenwich at LoveCleanStreets.org, they've been pretty good when I've reported stuff.  
 8:15 PM Aug 15th via Twittelator in reply to darryl1974

RT @NigeJT BBC Online features LoveCleanStreets/LoveLewisham in 'apps for Londoners' article:  
<http://bit.ly/adrFOV>  
 6:00 PM May 28th via Twittelator

See <http://twitter.com/lovelewisham> and <http://www.lovelewisham.org/> for more detail

### Perception Driver #3 Seeing Is Believing

The Wheel in detail: **“Perhaps unsurprisingly, residents are far more likely to hold entrenched attitudes and opinions if they have witnessed an event or activity that reinforces their view. Anything from negative personal experiences (e.g. being a victim of a crime), to observing street cleaning activities on their street on a regular basis can impact perceptions and push them in positive and negative directions.”**

It seems obvious to say that residents were keen to see the changes they wanted for their area happen but it is important to note that visual cues and actual improvement to infrastructure are, put simply, the most potent drivers of perception at a local level. One resident summed it up well:

*If a place is quite clean, you feel proud that (you) live there.*

However, as the Perception Wheel states, what we are referring to here can be both positively and negatively framed. Residents might see anything from a crime taking place to a litter picker regularly cleaning their street to young people hanging around to police patrolling the area and it is *seeing* these things that both negatively and positively impacts on resident perception.

*It happens outside my window every day.*

You may recall we talked earlier about something we call the momentum motivator? This is where residents in deprived communities are more likely to engage in activities designed to enhance their community, if they feel things are already beginning to improve.<sup>84</sup> With this in mind, we are

***“I like to see what’s going on - I want to see it happening.”***

*Resident, Partner Local Authority*

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<sup>84</sup> See Perception Principle #1 to refresh your memory on the ‘momentum motivator’. See also Docherty, I., et al. (2001)

sure you will appreciate that the *Seeing Is Believing* segment becomes even more important.

Typical attitude / opinion: “I’ll believe it when I see it.”

Recommended nudge: **Remember the impact of visible activity and our ‘momentum motivator’ rule – people are more likely to get involved if they see improvements are already starting to happen. Consider these facts during any ‘on the ground’ operations and when making decisions on scheduling. Also – and make a note of this – *Seeing Is Believing* is sometimes less about cleanliness and more about knowing someone cares. So, wherever possible, consider the use of ‘smart’ schedules. For example, try to ensure street cleansing takes place when residents are most likely to see the activity. Alternatively, consider leaving notes for residents when a successful initiative has been carried out.**

We know that visible changes to the local environment have a significant impact on perceptions of the same (and, frankly, we are aware this might seem a tad obvious). What we need to consider though are the ways in which we can utilise this knowledge to ensure any activity undertaken to deal with issues is not overlooked. Remember, human perception suffers limitations – if practitioners want their hard work to be recognised, they need to apply the same principle to the activity as they do to the result. In short, they need to make sure people see it!

Some local authorities appreciate this already.

We know of a council where one particular resident regularly complained about the cleanliness of his street. The council, satisfied that they did enough to deal with the objective ‘on the ground’ issues, decided not to deal with the complaints by increasing or intensifying the cleansing output at that location. Instead, they simply started to post a letter through the resident’s door detailing that they had been in attendance every time they came by to clean his street. With no changes to the street cleansing schedule made, the resident immediately stopped complaining about the cleanliness of his street.

In a similar story, we have talked to another local authority that took the *Seeing Is Believing* principle and simply started to flash the overhead lights on their cleansing machines when they were out and about. Fascinatingly, they tell us they have received considerably more positive feedback from residents since they started to do this.

Of course, these are just anecdotes but they do go some way to demonstrating the point that while residents do, of course, want to see real improvements to the local environmental quality of the neighbourhood in which they live, they may also just need reassurance that their local authority is going some way towards dealing with the issues in the first place. Again, consider the evidence – hidden somewhere within the latest public perception figures relating to litter! When queried directly about the issue fewer people say that litter is a problem locally. However, satisfaction with how local authorities deal with the issue has actually gone down.<sup>85</sup> So, it would seem *seeing* really is believing and, somewhat unfortunately, if local authorities are not taking credit for successful operations, credit will not be assigned to them by default.

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<sup>85</sup> Duffy, B. and Lee Chan, D. (2009) *People, Perceptions and Place*. London: Ipsos MORI

## Perception Driver #4

### Experts At Hand

The Wheel in detail: **“Many residents cite that the source of their ‘knowledge’ is an ‘expert’ in the field - be this a representative from the police or an employee of the council. This tends to give their anecdotes more credence and perpetuates the validity of their perceptions further.”**

Many residents were keen to validate their perceptions by referencing ‘expert sources’. These sources were normally individuals who worked for an authority body in the area (i.e. the police or the council) whose position gave them an air of authority and the resident’s perceptions a much more substantial degree of credibility.

*No, I’ve not heard anybody was shot and my husband (a police officer) tells me everything.*

*My brother is a cop, well, half my family are cops. It’s nowhere near as bad as people are making out.*

*My mum used to work for the council; she just didn’t like it. Everything was just really badly managed, and she just got fed up with it.*

This was a very powerful tool for respondents who wanted to stress the validity of their perception. Indeed, Keep Britain Tidy researchers witnessed significant sways in conforming responses, even within our small discussion groups, when a respondent made a reference to an ‘expert’.

**“One of our local publicans is ‘in’ with the police. He gets it from the police and tells everybody else.”**

*Resident, Partner Local Authority*

Typical attitude / opinion: **“My mum works for the council – she knows.”**

Recommended nudge: **Understand the value and importance of all internal communications and appreciate the powerful nature of the perceptions that originate from within your organisation. The people who work with you can be both your strongest ambassadors and your toughest critics. Their perspectives have considerable weight amongst the general public.**

Research recently conducted by independent PR firm, Edelman, has determined that (globally) people are more likely to consider conversations with employees as a credible source of information about a company than they are news coverage, online search engines or corporate communications. The same piece of research also confirms that experts are seen as the most credible sources of information (see Figure 5).<sup>86</sup> Now, Keep Britain Tidy accepts the limitations of this study for our use (namely, that it focuses on perceptions of companies, rather than public sector organisations and samples respondents with higher income brackets globally, rather than those from deprived areas in England), but we can anecdotally support the assertion that respondents saw employees as ‘experts’ and that they used them as credible references to support specific points of view.

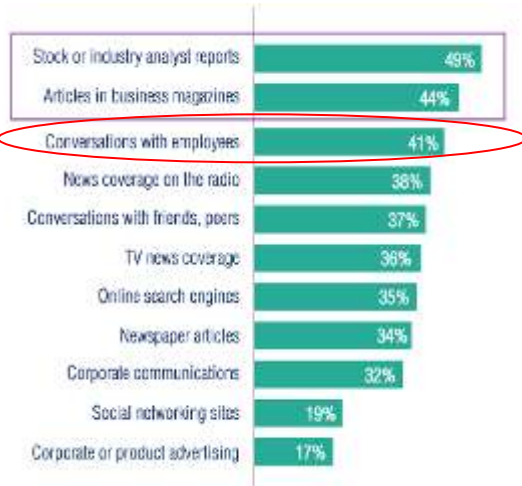
Of course, what the *Experts At Hand* perception driver also serves to highlight is that the people who combine to build an organisation’s personnel (a local authority’s employees, for instance) also combine to form part of the perception networks that they serve. Unwittingly, this makes employees of any organisation incredibly influential players in changing perceptions.

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<sup>86</sup> Edelman (2010) *Edelman Trust Barometer: An annual global opinion leaders study*. The 2010 Edelman Trust Barometer is the firm’s 10th annual trust and credibility survey. The survey was produced by research firm StrategyOne and consisted of 25-minute telephone interviews using the fieldwork services of World One from September 29 - December 6, 2009. The 2010 Edelman Trust Barometer survey sampled 4,875 informed public in two age groups (25-34 and 35-64). All informed members of the public met the following criteria: college-educated; household income in the top quartile for their age in their country; read or watch business/news media at least several times a week; follow public policy issues in the news at least several times a week. For more information see <http://www.edelman.com/trust/2010/#>

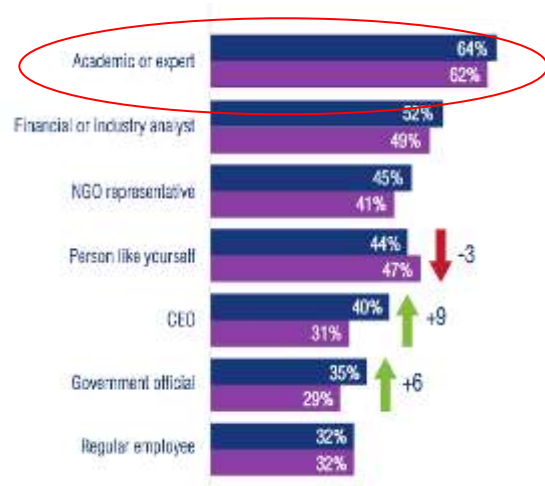
**Figure 5 Edelman Trust Barometer**

How credible do you believe each of the following is, as a source of information about a company?



Informed public ages 25 – 64 in 20 countries  
'Extremely credible' and 'Very credible' responses only;  
selected sources

If you heard information about a company from one of these people, how credible would the information be?



Informed public ages 25 – 64 in 20 countries  
'Extremely credible' and 'Very credible' responses only

■ 2009 ■ 2010

Now, we are sure all local authorities appreciate how important their employees are and we've no desire to preach to the choir. But needless to say, a happy employee is far more likely to share positive stories within their social networks than one that feels ill-informed or otherwise dissatisfied with their employer. Again, the LGA have already pointed out:

*Staff play a crucial role in building a council's reputation. Whether they are frontline staff or officers representing the council externally, the way they behave and how they talk about the council can have a huge impact. Good internal communications is therefore very important in helping a council achieve its objectives. This is particularly important when a high proportion of council staff are also residents. The councils that perform most effectively are most likely to have staff who would speak up for their council externally.<sup>87</sup>*

Unfortunately, this same piece of research also confirmed council staff are less likely to speak well of the organisation than private sector employees, with only one in three likely to speak up for the council and sell its work externally. At Keep Britain

<sup>87</sup> Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute (2008) *The reputation of local government: Literature review to support the 'My Council' campaign.*

Tidy we would challenge any authority body to ask themselves if their employees are happy and if their organisation is committed to communicating well with their own *Experts At Hand*.



## Perception Driver #5

### Story Telling

The Wheel in detail: **“Story telling, or word of mouth, is a strong source of information for residents. Stories and ‘local news’ are spread in person / in the neighbourhood. In the tradition of urban legend and Chinese whispers, stories frequently evolve and mutate, gaining momentum as they travel. Often particularly apparent in deprived communities where community ties are more pronounced.”**

You will remember our earlier discussions about how perceptions travel through perception networks and how the makeup of perception networks in deprived communities intensifies the influence of a perception at neighbourhood level. Well it is because of this fact that, somewhat frustratingly, *Story Telling* is likely to be both the most prevailing driver of perception in deprived communities and the most difficult for local authorities to manage.

*People talk.*

*Its word of mouth isn't it?*

However, there is some good news. Though the vast majority of respondents cited word of mouth as a source of perception, at some point or another, there was almost universal acceptance that stories are not always the most reliable foundation on which to build perceptions.

*Word of mouth ends up as Chinese whispers doesn't it?*

*Before I came here I honestly hadn't heard anything about this reputation of gun crime. I didn't know much about the city before I came here but I hadn't heard any bad things. It's only been since I've been here that people have said, 'Oh did you hear about this?'*

Irrespective of this recognition of unreliability, Keep Britain Tidy did see the impact of story telling numerous times and even witnessed the effect first hand during the discussion groups. For instance, we know residents were keen to highlight their

concern at the apparent lack of transparency regarding the way public funds get allocated and spent. In our role as researchers and observers, we were able to see how the negativity in some respondents' comments had a tendency to spiral throughout the groups where people were, otherwise, indifferent to the topic.

Typical attitude / opinion: **"I know through word of mouth – someone told me."**

Recommended nudge: **Become an active part of the perception networks that have your services on their lips. Figure out what it is about a story that makes it worth talking about and see if you can enter the debate with stories of your own. Make sure they are stories with the 'talkability' factor.<sup>88</sup>**

Do you remember Mr. Tidy and the litter in the alleyway problem he told his perception network about? Do you remember the impact his story had on the culture of his community? Well, this tale best represents the power of story telling and illuminates the fact that perceptions of local government are commonly formed via word of mouth from friends and family.<sup>89</sup>

Take a look at the visualisation below.



<sup>88</sup> Talkability is a registered trademark of Frank PR- see <http://www.frankpr.it/>

<sup>89</sup> Taylor, S., & Williams, B. (2006) *Ibid.*

Let's assume each Perception Wheel in this visualisation represents an individual and that these individuals are all connected – they are a perception network. Each individual in the perception network has their own balance of perception drivers and all of these drivers work together to influence their perceptions in some way.

At Keep Britain Tidy, we are asserting that practitioners need to consider the ways they can become more connected to these perception networks. They need to consider the ways they can gain access to what people in the neighbourhoods they look after are talking about and think of inventive ways to enter the debate. In short, they need to be part of the conversation and they need to make sure *all* communications they initiate are a two-way affair.

In light of the recent spending review and budget cuts, we envision *Story Telling* will become an increasingly powerful perception driver, making it one local government will want to understand well and harness in imaginative ways. Not only that, cuts in funding to service delivery will require practitioners to think of new and innovative ways of meeting the needs of local communities, and practitioners will be more reliant than ever on the buy-in and participation of their residents in these schemes.<sup>90</sup> What these schemes need then is an element of 'talkability' – factors that will enhance people's stories and the desire to share them with other people.

Talkability is what encourages people to share a story or piece of information. Talkability can start word of mouth epidemics and talkability can keep the conversation going.

In 2008, Keep Britain Tidy dumped a giant cigarette butt in the middle of Trafalgar Square (see the image below). It wasn't that we had changed our stance on cigarette-related litter. No, what we were actually aiming to do was create a 'buzz' around our campaign to stop people dropping their cigarette butts on our streets. And the tactic did get people talking.

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<sup>90</sup> For more on using social networking to achieve this aim please see Local 2.0 (2010) *Listen, Participate, Transform; A social media framework for local government. A Local 2.0 think-piece* London: The Young Foundation



The story managed to achieve media coverage worth £1.54m including articles in the Daily and Sunday Telegraph, on the BBC and ITN websites. There was also coverage on BBC Radio 4. More pertinently, the story also caught the imagination of the press internationally with journalists for Polish, French, Spanish, German and Ukrainian newspapers all covering the story.

Perhaps you are thinking to yourself, “That’s great, but where am I going to find a giant cigarette?” Well, you’ll be pleased to hear there are more budget friendly ways to approach local environmental quality issues using talkability! Our Red Rubber Band campaign which ran last spring/summer is also a good example of how Keep Britain Tidy have used the concept of talkability to raise awareness and rally support on a littering issue. As part of the campaign we appealed to members of the public to send any red rubber bands dropped on the streets into us so that we could return them to Royal Mail.

The campaign appeared to appeal to the public as there was a clear call to action and also somewhere to lay the blame! Our campaign against postal workers dropping rubber bands also gripped the imagination of the media, generating national and local media coverage worth an incredible £4.66m – one of the best values yet for one of our campaigns.

Among the highlights of the media activity were our appearances on BBC Breakfast, Radio 4’s Today programme and 5 Live. The story also featured in the Daily Mail,

Daily Telegraph, the Guardian and the Sun, and the issue was also covered by many local newspapers and radio stations across the country.

Better yet, the public were getting in touch. Keep Britain Tidy received more than 200 letters of support during the campaign, including this one from Heywood in Lancashire:

*Thank you for raising the issue of red rubber bands dropped by postal workers. It is something I've noticed recently on the avenue where I live and I've wondered what I could do, as just one person...Now I know it's been raised at a higher level I feel more confident that I can play a small part in, hopefully, a bigger change.*

## Perception Driver #6 Strength In Numbers

The Wheel in detail: **“There is a general belief in the accuracy and authority of numbers. Statistics, rankings and similar ‘snippets’ of information are frequently taken out of context or cited erroneously as the source of resident perception. Perhaps unsurprisingly, confirming where the figures are from is much more challenging for them.”**

Perhaps the least common driver of perception overall, the tendency to cite statistics, counts or numbers, in any form, was still a powerful influence. Indeed, despite the fact that most residents could not provide any specific source or reference for their figures, citing numbers to support the apparent magnitude of an issue seemed to be a popular tactic with some. And some figures seemed more consistently memorable than others.

*“It was the second biggest...”*

*“They’ve got £8 million to spend...”*

*“We’re like 3rd highest...”*

Typical attitude / opinion: **“We’re something like the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest for gun crime?”**

Recommended nudge: **Make a conscious effort to debunk inaccurate statistics and provide residents with positive alternatives. Always take the time to consider whether the statistics you are providing are memorable or have what some might call the ‘stickiness factor’.**<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Gladwell, M. (2000) *Ibid.*

When author Malcolm Gladwell talks about the 'stickiness factor' he asks, "Is the message memorable? Is it so memorable, in fact, that it can create change, that it can spur someone to action?"<sup>92</sup>

During our research we saw evidence of people consistently citing numbers and statistics in order to reinforce the credibility of their perceptions. However, contrary to what this experience would appear to indicate, research tells us people don't actually trust official statistics.<sup>93</sup> Keep Britain Tidy believes this paradoxical phenomenon occurs because statistics are fairly easy to remember and to repeat; they have the 'stickiness factor'. Equally, maybe people don't trust statistics because they are acutely aware of how pervasive they can be and how inaccurately they themselves have used them in the past! Nevertheless, there are certainly ways local government can use knowledge of this perception driver to their advantage.

There should be some focus on statistics that tell positive stories. We know, for instance, that it wouldn't be a huge leap to suggest that these positive statistics could work to engender a greater sense of pride in place – are you the cleanest borough in England? Do your residents know that fact? We also know that if they tell a new and somewhat unexpected story, people are more likely to talk about them.

Authors Chip and Dan Heath have asked the question why some ideas stick and others do not. They suggest that ideas that are simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional and that *tell a story* (our emphasis) become 'sticky'.<sup>94</sup> The more of these ingredients they have, the stickier the idea becomes.

So, why not invest time in debunking the negative statistics that are prevalent within your local authority area? Give communities unexpected, emotional and credible stories that contain those all important 'sticky numbers'. You could even run short comparative surveys – tell people what you know they think and then convert them by giving them the facts they need to know.

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<sup>92</sup> Gladwell, M. (2000) *Ibid.* p 92

<sup>93</sup> According to the Office of National Statistics just 36% of people believe official statistics are accurate. See <http://www.metro.co.uk/weird/121017-statistic-we-dont-trust-statistics>

<sup>94</sup> Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2008) *Made to Stick: Why some ideas survive and others die*. New York: Random House

## Perception Driver #7 Prevailing Wisdom

The Wheel in detail: **“Often residents will claim that they ‘just know’ that things are the way they perceive them to be. In fact, on many occasions, residents will just assume everyone sees things as they do and that their views are not only conventional but also entirely correct.”**

Thinking about the ‘source’ of their perceptions, for some of the residents consulted, was a real challenge. Invariably though, there was a fair proportion who asserted that their perceptions were less likely perceptions *per se* and more likely a simple reflection of the ways things actually are. In other words, (rather contradictory) they asserted that their perceptions were ‘common knowledge’.

***“It’s public knowledge.”***

*Resident, Partner Local Authority*

*I’ve got normal gripes about paying so much council tax and things like that. But I presume that’s everybody.*

Indeed, Prevailing Wisdom is what happens when a person internalises their perception of things ('normalises' them), until they genuinely believe that what they think and feel about something is right. Furthermore, they will frequently think that everybody else thinks the same way too.

Typical attitude / opinion: **“Everybody knows that, don’t they?”**

Recommended nudge: **Identify which factors (from the Perception Wheel or otherwise) are reinforcing the belief that a perception is common knowledge.**

**Should those factors be beyond your control, the next best thing will be to ensure you are aware of the perceptions that are out there, so you can focus your delivery on beginning to tackle them at a local level.**



*Prevailing Wisdom* is a tough perception driver to tackle. However, practitioners will be half-way there if they understand what the prevailing wisdom is, regarding local environmental quality and related antisocial behaviour in the communities they manage. Indeed, consultation is key to enabling local authorities and other agencies to begin to think about ways in which to dispel myths and counter the factors that serve to reinforce them.

It should be useful then to understand that prevailing wisdom thrives under three primary conditions:

1. **Majority Rule!** People are more likely to perceive things a certain way when the majority do.<sup>95</sup>
2. **Credibility Counts!** People are more likely to perceive things a certain way when credible and influential individuals support the theory.
3. **Confusion Reigns!** People are more likely to perceive things a certain way when the only information available to them is in some way ambiguous.<sup>96</sup>

Here are some useful ways of thinking about these conditions:

1. **Majority Rule!** How can you use this rule to penetrate perception networks with new forms of wisdom? Can you use the majority rule condition to your advantage? (The majority rule condition is basically a social norm condition – see Perception Principle #2)
2. **Credibility Counts!** Do you know who the credible and influential people are in the perception networks you work with? Can you get them to spread your message?
3. **Confusion Reigns!** Make sure you provide communities with clarity of information, knowledge on who to ask if they are still not sure and the means to access these individuals without complication.

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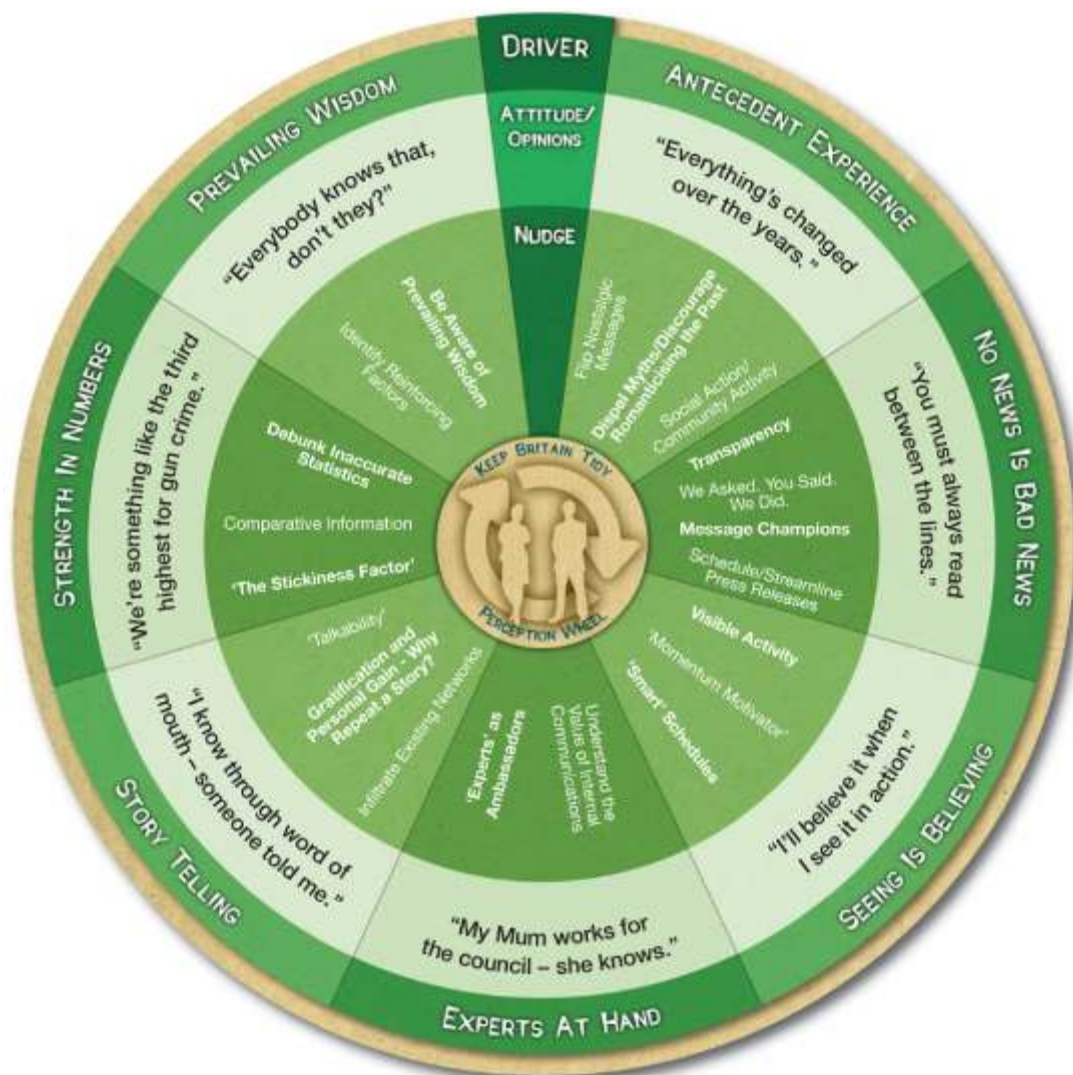
<sup>95</sup> See Asch, S. E. (1955) Opinions and Social Pressure. *Scientific American*, 193: 31-35

<sup>96</sup> See Sherif, M. (1937) An Experimental Approach to the Study of Attitudes. *Sociometry* 1: 90 – 98. Sherif's experiment and the concept of conformity is also discussed in Thaler, R. and Sunstein, C. (2008) pp 61 - 63

## The Keep Britain Tidy Perceptions Change Wheel

So there you have it, the seven key drivers of perception in the boroughs we visited. We hope some, if not all, resonate with the experiences you have had working in and with communities. Where we have been able to think about the ways in which knowledge of these seven drivers can be used to *change* perception or, at least, give them a 'nudge' in the right direction we have summarised them within the Perceptions Change Wheel, depicted below.

## The Keep Britain Tidy Perceptions Change Wheel



The Perceptions Change Wheel details the relevant driver towards the centre, the typical attitudes and opinions displayed by residents utilising that driver in the middle sphere and what we consider to be the most effective 'nudges' summarised on the outside.

## **PART THREE**

### **Putting the Wheels in Motion: Key recommendations and closing remarks**

**Keep Britain Tidy hopes this research report will stimulate debate about the power of perceptions.**

**We believe that understanding how perceptions are formed, maintained and changed is of vital importance, if we are ever going to narrow the perception / reality gap and bridge the inequality of experience between more and less deprived communities.**

In this section of the report we summarise our conclusions and detail some of the key recommendations to fall out of the research.

**In all forms, communications are a vital ingredient to closing the perception / reality gap.**

One of the primary recommendations to come out of this research project, we would encourage authorities and groups working with communities to utilise the Keep Britain Tidy Perception Wheel as a tool for measuring the effectiveness of communications. Keep Britain Tidy is keen the Perception Wheel be used to filter any and all messages directed towards communities.

Marketing teams may want to use the Perception Wheel, for example, when developing a campaign. Certainly we would recommend they scan the segments and ask themselves, does our campaign combat *Prevailing Wisdom* or utilise *Strength In Numbers*? If they are working with a particularly deprived neighbourhood they might also ponder whether they have an element of 'talkability' ingrained in the message. This would take advantage of the *Story Telling* already happening within the powerful social networks in the communities they are trying to reach.

The Perception Wheel might also be of use in developing strategies for local engagement, in staff training and development (never forget your *Experts At Hand*), in programme development and in partnership working.

**Remember that people do not conceptualise 'community' in a uniform way.**

Recognising that 'community' does not mean the same thing to all people is an important step in enabling authorities to develop campaigns and methods of engagement that really 'speak' to the communities with which they are working. The rule of thumb is to better tailor messages to more deprived communities. Remember

to localise, emotionalise and personalise wherever possible – broad messages simply won't do the job.

**Motivations to 'get involved' are likely to vary based on levels of deprivation**

People from more deprived communities are less likely to think feelings of influence are important, so using a traditional 'make a difference' call to action is unlikely to work. Communications are much more likely to be successful if they account for the very specific and very strong emotional bonds people in deprived communities tend to be more likely to share.

**People are more likely to get involved if they already think changes are starting to happen**

If you can build the momentum of activity towards a specific aim you are on your way to recruiting support from the community. By appealing to their desire for more instant gratification, deprived areas in particular need to see change. Telling them about it is definitely not the same thing!

**Deprivation influences how quickly and how far perceptions are likely to travel and deprivation can influence how quickly an authority is likely to become part of these conversations.**

People from more deprived communities are far more likely to talk to each other about their experiences than people from less deprived communities. So, authorities should be aware – poor perceptions of your performance will travel fast through a deprived neighbourhood.

Authorities should also note that, because of this tendency to talk to one another, there can sometimes be a delay in reports reaching the people who can bring about change. Somewhat problematically, poor perceptions of performance could have reached a significant number of community members before those responsible even know about the problem.

Authorities have no choice but to infiltrate neighbourhood networks using community champions as conduits to the conversations going on 'on the ground'. This will enable swift responses to problems that may otherwise go unreported.

**At Keep Britain Tidy we believe that adoption of the practical recommendations, provided within this research paper, will almost certainly pave the way for more effective strategies for narrowing the perception / reality gap. However, we also firmly believe there is scope to further explore the power of perceptions and how best to positively influence them.**

With this in mind we would like to take a moment to highlight some of the questions we are likely to reflect on as the project moves in to its next phase.

How do we continue to encourage our stakeholders to consider perceptions a crucial part of the bigger performance management picture?

Are there ways to quantify the influence of the perceptions drivers nationally or at a local level?

How do we ensure that our stakeholders focus on the perception drivers exerting the most influence in the neighbourhoods they work with?

How can we assist our stakeholders in effectively and efficiently measuring the success of any interventions?

What is the most effective way to share experiences and encourage stakeholders to learn for one another?